THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. PAUL

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EIGHT CHAPTERS OF HIS EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

BY THE

REV. J. OSWALD DYKES, M.A. D.D.

AUTHOR OF

"THE MANIFESTO OF THE KING," "ABRAHAM, THE FRIEND OF GOD"

ETC. ETC.

κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν μου

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PREFACE.

ANY one who pays to this book the compliment of glancing through its pages will readily perceive that it is neither a commentary nor a treatise in theology. It is neither addressed to scholars nor to divines.

Nor does it set forth any novel interpretation of the Apostle's teaching. After so many centuries of study, the likelihood that it has been reserved for this generation to discover the right sense of St. Paul's most important Letter appears to the Author sufficiently small.

What he has ventured to attempt is to restate in plain —that is, non-technical — language the course of the argument and the development of thought through these famous chapters, in such a way as may prove of assistance to readers who possess an intelligent interest in evangelical truth. How far he has been successful in this attempt it is for others to say.

About one-half of the volume appeared some time ago in the columns of the "Homiletic Magazine." These chapters have been revised. The rest is printed here for the first time.

Thanks are due and are hereby given to the University Press at Oxford and Cambridge, the Proprietors of the "Revised Version," for kindly permitting that rendering of the text to be prefixed to each chapter.

No one can be so well aware as the Author himself how far his work falls short alike of its theme and of his own design. May He of Whose Way of Salvation it treats deign to forgive its faults and use it for His own sacred ends, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

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THE

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. PAUL.

CHAPTER I.

AT ROME ALSO.

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."
ROM. i. 16.

WHEN St. Paul set himself at Corinth to dictate this long letter which the deaconess Phœbe had undertaken to carry with her to the Roman Church, he had never yet visited the Eternal City. For years, indeed, he tells us, he had cherished a strong desire to do so; but the necessity of finishing his work in Asia Minor and Greece, together with the disturbed condition of some of the Churches he had founded in these countries, had hitherto prevented him from travelling farther west. Now, however, he was on the point of leaving the Greek provinces. One small piece of business only remained to be done: the sum of money collected at his desire by the Christians of Macedonia and Achaia for converted Jews in the Holy Land had to be safely conveyed to Jerusalem. This was to be the winding up of his mission-work among the Greeks.

That fairly accomplished and off his mind, he saw nothing to keep him any longer from sailing westward, to Italy first, and, if God pleased, far beyond Italy, to the land of the setting sun, the Spanish Peninsula.

Already, therefore, his eager mind was full of Rome. The departure of sister Phœbe on business which took her to the capital and would need the help of brethren there, gave him an excellent opportunity to prepare them for his own visit. Paul could not sit down to write such a letter without having his imagination and his feelings stirred. Rome has never ceased to be a name of power from his day to ours; but nothing in its history since then, no modern analogy, not even the magic which eighteen more centuries of vicissitudes have gathered around the word, can enable us moderns to realise what Rome meant in the first Christian century. London and Paris rolled into one would not be to the world of to-day what Rome was to the world then. It was simply and literally the world's sole capital. Out from it went forth the edicts which the world obeyed, and the rulers whose coming every land awaited as the coming of its king. Back into it poured without stint or ceasing the tributary wealth of the richest and fairest portions of the cultivated earth and of all navigated seas. Every great road which traversed the earth radiated from that one imperial city. There was not a fort or garrison town on civilized or semi-civilized territory but bore its military ensigns. From Anglesea to the Euphrates, from the mouths of the Rhine to the cataracts of the Nile, the world knew but one word of power, and that word was Rome. St. Paul was a Roman citizen: could the thought that he too, at last, should see Rome, and carry his message to the heart of the mighty mistress city, fail to quicken his pulses?

For a moment, it might almost seem as though the thought shook even his missionary courage. But he recalls how his great commission laid it on him as a "debt" which he owed to every Gentile land that he should carry the Gospel to it. So he braces himself for this most arduous call, and, so far as it lies on him, proclaims himself ready, without shrinking, to preach even to the Romans. For what need had he even within that seat of all earthly power, military or political, where its august embodiment sat enthroned and deified in purple, to be ashamed of his message as though it were a weak thing? Nay, but it too is a word of power; power, not of a deified man, but of the living God; power, not to enslave and crush and bleed the tributary nations, but to save, to set free, to lift into everlasting life the souls of men. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is God's power to salvation to every one that believeth."

These are brave words: but how much more would this missionary's confidence in his message have been tried had he been permitted to foresee when and how he should at length attain his desire to visit Rome! Had he foreseen that within three months he should be lying a prisoner in a Roman castle at Cesarea; that three years must pass before he should enter the gates of Rome; that when he did so it should be in a weaker and more shameful fashion than he had ever dreamed of, marching a footsore prisoner along the Via Appia, chained by the wrist to a Roman soldier; that the time which he hoped to spend in the society of the Roman Church should be simply years of detention under the strong hand of Roman law, broken only by arraignments at the imperial tribunal and recurrent fear of execution; that at the last, alone, forsaken, an aged and helpless captive worn with long imprisonment, he should look his last at Rome from that memor-

able spot beyond the Ostian Gate, and count it a farewell boon due to his Roman citizenship that his head was to fall beneath the swift and merciful stroke of a Roman headsman. Ah! had the active, hopeful, eager man who wrote these words in Corinth foreseen all this, would he have said as stoutly, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is God's power"?

He surely might. Paul's word is alive to-day. Where is the word of Nero? Paul's Gospel is as much as ever the power of God. The Rome of Nero we dig for to-day beneath its burial mounds. On the ruins of old Rome, the message which Paul preached has built a spiritual empire many times wider than the empire of the Cæsars. The obscure missionary who was led on foot through the Appian Gate among the throng of passengers, bound to a soldier of Nero's army, has proved the mightier of the two; and who shall say to-day at Rome that Paul had any cause to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ?

Let us look more closely at the ground of St. Paul's confidence in his message. It was a word of power which the man had to speak. So far, there is nothing novel in this. It is by no means a new thing or without example, that a man with no official or armed strength to back him should have a message on his tongue before which the brute force of arms and empire shall turn out to be but weakness. It is a long while indeed since men found out that truth is that which "endures and is always strong," which "lives and conquers for evermore." "All works shake and tremble at it, for with it there is no unrighteous thing." To know the righteous truth, and to love it and to speak it, is to be more than a king. For it is by their thoughts men are really ruled, and he who can speak true thoughts which seize and sway the spirits of his fellow-men may win an empire wider than Rome's.

Paul witnessing to the Gospel at Nero's bar is a repetition of his Master witnessing to Himself at Pilate's bar; and the force on which Jesus rested His own Kingship was no other than this, that He was born to bear witness unto the truth. There was, therefore, no reason to be ashamed of the Gospel merely because it was no more than a Gospel, a message, a story, a word of truth; for words of truth are stronger than armed men. The very fact that when God undertook to save men from their sins He elected to do it by what Paul elsewhere calls the "foolishness of preaching"—that is, by a spoken word—proves that among the mighty forces of human history this is, after all, the mightiest.

But then, in Paul's day, the world was grown very weary of words which had in them no power at all, or, if power, at least not power to *save*. Some centuries earlier, Greece had held the sceptre among the nations, and held it by virtue of her wisdom. Her words had been words of teaching. Mythologies, philosophies, literature, rhetoric, science, art—the whole many-provinced realm of intellectual effort had been hers without a rival; but out of her wise words there had come no power of salvation for suffering and sinful men. Her golden age was over now; her philosophies discredited; her faith dead; her arts hired out to the foreigner for gain; and the net result before men's eyes was confessedly this: that by its wisdom the world had failed to know God. Cowardice, greed, licentiousness, luxury, superstition—these were the things which (as contemporary literature shows) flourished in the chief Greek communities where Paul had for years been labouring. As for any healthful or regenerating power men had once dreamt of in Grecian thought or Grecian letters, these agencies had proved as weak before the vices of mankind as tow in flame.

Words of power, indeed, there still were in that world which Paul knew; words strong enough to hold both Greek and barbarian in discontented quiet; words of law and order running swiftly through every land, and felt at the extremities of the empire. But they were words, not of learned, thoughtful Greece, but of rude, warlike Rome. They were the words of imperial edicts and severe jurisprudence and military command; and no one could have lived as Paul had done in many provinces of the empire without knowing well that the fearfully strong grasp of Roman despotism, while it held the earth meantime tranquil, and on the whole ruled it justly, was a grasp which could never save, could only strangle and kill the lives of nations and of men.

The world of that day was weary enough of both. Weary of words which promised life but had no power to give it; brain-spun speculations about God and man which made nothing clear, which had no influence whatever over the bad passions of the individual, which brought no hope to the poor or the slave: in these Greek theories there was no Gospel of power unto salvation. Weary too of words which had behind them the terrific and sometimes brutal strength of Roman legions, but used it not to elevate subject races, to enfranchise the enslaved, to regenerate public manners, to purify, to teach; used it only to bind the yoke firmer on the degenerate peoples, to crush out every nobler instinct, to debauch the mob with cruel spectacles, to make the great world one vast preserve, feeding the pride and luxury of an Italian court. In the words of Roman rule also there was no Gospel unto salvation.

In the midst of all this, St. Paul carried what he knew to be a divine message of help—God's own miraculous word, charged with a loftier wisdom than that of Greece,

backed by a mightier authority than that of Rome, and instinct with spiritual life and everlasting salvation for the men of every land. What that heavenly message is it was the object of this long letter to unfold. Briefly, it may be said to be the revelation of God's righteousness in His Son and of God's life by His Spirit. Of God's righteousness first, which was by faith of Jesus Christ to all them that believed, in virtue of which God, by a gratuitous act of His grace, declared them righteous through the redemption that was in Christ, whom God had set forth as a propitiatory sacrifice for sin. By this new and divine method of declaring sinful men righteous in His sight, St. Paul taught that God set them free at once from the curse of His law, gave peace to their uneasy consciences, and restored them to the joy of His favour. St. Paul's message had in those days, and has still, this much at least to recommend it, that it pushed forward into prominence, as its very earliest gift, a liberation of the conscience from that unatoned guilt against which men had hitherto struggled in vain to be free. Always that memory of a sinful past had haunted earnest minds; always that fear of penalty had paralyzed their efforts to be good and chilled their hope in God. No theory of evil as merely another form of good could shake the plain testimony of the human conscience affirming guilt. Sacrifice and lustration had proved ineffectual to lift off this dread of a nemesis to come. Like a gravestone on every soul dead in its sins lay the sentence of God's avenging justice; for while neither Nature nor philosophy availed to reveal any way of justification for a sinner, the wrath of God was sufficiently revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men to put them beyond excuse, and fill them at times with soul-shaking alarms for the "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish," which

overhung "every soul of man that did evil." Amid heathen darkness more dimly—in the twilight of Judaism more vividly—men everywhere felt that the Powers on high were angry. It was, therefore, a most welcome feature of Paul's message from God, that to men in their sins, as they were (if they would but repent), He offered pardon and gratuitous acceptance as righteous persons in Christ Jesus.

This, however, was but the first half of the divine word. The same faith which identifies a sinful man with Christ, so that he becomes justified in Him through His death, brings to that man divine life as well. To be in Christ (Paul taught) is to be made a new creature, alive with a new life, thenceforth no longer the willing slave of sin, but free to serve God as His adopted child, inspired by His Holy Spirit. If, while wicked men were still God's enemies, God reconciled them through the death of His Son, how much more, now that He has reconciled them to friendship, will He go on to save these friends of His by His Son's life! Before the man who hears such words, who accepts Christ as his Quickener, there opens out a prospect of ultimate deliverance from everything bad, or base, or unworthy, of final emancipation into the glorious freedom and felicity of the children of God. God will not do His work by halves. Having taken up our case so strongly, He will spare nothing now for the sake of men for whom He has already sacrificed His Son. The message grows more wonderful and glorious as it rolls along. Starting from justification, it ends in glory. It is good news at its beginning; better news at its close. At first it is the word of God cancelling guilt; by-and-by it becomes also the power of God unto the complete and everlasting salvation of fallen humanity in soul and body. It ends at once in a challenge and a triumph. "Who shall

lay anything to the charge of God's chosen ones?" "In all things we are more than conquerors!"

This is that word of good tidings which St. Paul felt he could carry without discredit to the capital seat of empire. Already he had proved it upon the Greeks; and Corinth, where he wrote, was evidence that "the foolishness of God" had shown itself "wiser than men." Now he was ready to prove it also upon the Romans; persuaded that, as the weakness of God, it would turn out stronger than men.

The power which resides in a word, or which operates through a word, requires one (and no more than one) condition for its operation—it must be believed. Old Eli, bowed with the weight of years, sat in the city gate of Shiloh, when a message came to him which had in it a power of death. But if Eli had not believed the fatal tidings of that Benjamite who professed to report the disastrous issue of the day's engagement, Eli would not have fallen dead in a fit by the side of the gate. The message which another Benjamite spoke at midnight to the Roman jailer had in it, on the contrary, a power of spiritual life. But if that jailer had not received Paul's record of God concerning His Son, no life could have visited his rude, dark, heathen soul. Faith is no exceptional demand on the Gospel's part. It is the condition of all power which comes by word, whether it be a word that teaches or a word that commands. Though the power of God, operating through His Gospel, is an exceptional power, since it is the direct energy of the Holy Ghost which quickens dead souls, yet God has chosen this particular vehicle of speech for His life-giving, saving, spiritual energy, and having chosen it, He respects its ordinary laws. Salvation must come by faith, because faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

It is, therefore, to him only who believes its message, but to every one who does believe it, that the Gospel proves to be God's power unto salvation. Faith on the part of the hearer is that which must liberate the divine might which resides in the word ready to operate.

We have in this law of the Gospel's operation a ready explanation, if at any time we feel surprised that the Gospel seems to effect so little. It has been a long while in the world since St. Paul wrote; yet ours is far from being a saved world. It has been told to the men of our own generation in this land, till not a few have grown quite weary with hearing it; yet everywhere there is a cry in the air that vice spreads and society grows not a whit wholesomer. But it is no fair reproach to any salvation which comes by word that it fails to benefit people who do not believe it. The reproach would only be fair if you could show that any man had honestly accepted this message, and lived upon the faith of it, yet for all that had been none the better for it. No enemy of Christianity, who knew what he was saying, has ever been bold enough to allege that. Look how it has been with ourselves. This Gospel of gratuitous justification and spiritual renewal in Christ Jesus has been familiar to every one of us from childhood. In every conceivable form of words it has been addressed to us. By words of the Holy Book and words to explain the Book—by words spoken and words printed—by hymns learned in childhood at parents' knee and sermons from a hundred pulpits. In fact, it has as good as saturated the whole religious, and literary, and social atmosphere we live in; till we fancy there is nothing in this world we know so well—no story ever told which has been worn so threadbare. All your days, therefore, one might say to any unbelieving person, you have been in ceaseless contact with the saving strength

of God. A divine force has been round about you, touching you, playing on your nature through that Gospel story as a vehicle, a force competent to deliver you from sin, and intended to do so. Is it impertinent now to ask, Has it saved you? What appreciable good effect can you trace to it? Have you the peace of forgiveness from God? Have you the Spirit of Christ? Are you set free from the love of sin, or transformed in temper and tastes into child-like resemblance to the Heavenly Father? These are the things which the Gospel does when it is God's power to the salvation of a man; and it is fair to ask if such effects have become visible in you. Shall we blame the Gospel if they have not? Is it then grown weak? It claims to wrap up within it the highest divine energy. Is that a delusive boast? Stop a moment. Before you call the Gospel weak, ask how you have received it. The faith which has to be exercised about any word varies with the nature of the word. This word from God is spiritual, and it asks not an intellectual but a spiritual faith, a moral submission, a religious surrender of the whole being to the influence of the truth told and the authority of the Person speaking. Have you yielded it that sort of faith—the only sort which, in a case like this, *is* faith? You hold all Christian teaching for true, and you hear it with respect; but have you accepted of God's method for your justification, and welcomed God's Spirit into you for your regeneration? To lay your conscience and religious affections open to the free entrance and fair play upon them of God's loving words in His Son is not an accidental of Christianity; it is essential. It is on your side the indispensable condition of any energy put forth on you by God for your salvation. Blame not the Gospel, therefore, but yourselves. The power is there, as much there for you as for others. But it lies

dormant because hitherto you have received God's message as a word only, not a power; because you are careful to keep it outside of your real life, in the region of your notions, opinions, or professions, but will not let it in among those everlasting verities which practically form you and rule you and animate you from hour to hour, which are the ever-present companions of your thoughts, the springs of your desires, and the lords of your will. Do this, and see if the Gospel of Christ leave you long an unaltered, unbettered man. Do this, and if it develop no power of salvation within you which you can call divine —then be ashamed of it for a weak pretender, like the other systems in the world which profess great things and achieve little; then, but not till then. It is the power of God unto salvation—only you must do it the justice to believe it.

CHAPTER II.

RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH.

"For therein is revealed a righteousness of God by faith unto faith: as it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith."—ROM. i. 17.

THESE words are to be read in close connection with those of the preceding verse. The two verses form a single compact sentence which may be put thus: "The Gospel is God's power to salvation to every believer, because in it God's righteousness by faith is revealed to faith." The Gospel which Paul was not ashamed to preach even at Rome is a divine power able to save all sorts of men; to save them, of course, from their sins and to an eternal life with God. It has this saving power, because in it there is revealed God's own righteousness. And it exerts its saving power on believers only, because the righteousness which it does reveal is one "from faith to faith."

So put, the whole sentence forms, as every student of this Epistle knows, its fundamental proposition or thesis; to the explanation, proof, and enforcement of which the doctrinal portion of the letter is devoted. In no other portion of St. Paul's writings does he so carefully lay down at the outset what he is about to establish. Nowhere else does he so rigorously carry on a logical proof of his main proposition throughout an entire treatise. I may add, that nowhere else does he set himself so expressly to explain in what the Gospel actually consists—that is, the

essential truths lying at the heart of the Christian revelation. It is to be expected, therefore, that a proposition of such consequence will be very carefully and accurately worded; that its terms will be employed in their most strict and technical Christian sense; and that everything for the right understanding of the sentence must turn upon a correct definition of its language.

Before we can arrive, therefore, at the chief ideas which are tied up compendiously in this sentence we must first try to reach the correct sense of its principal words. The study of these, in fact, will conduct us of itself to the ideas.

(1.) The most characteristic and weighty expression, of course, is *God's righteousness*, the revelation of which makes the Gospel to be a saving power.* Perhaps the first idea to strike any one on hearing this phrase, "the righteousness of God," would be that it described an attribute of the divine character. It is the foundation of Jehovah's judicial sovereignty that He is just (or righteous) in all His ways. His acts or decisions are always in conformity with His moral nature; and His nature is in perfect harmony with eternal and absolute rectitude. Unquestionably, this ground character of Godhead is the

* There are unfortunately two English words in use for the one Greek word everywhere used by St. Paul. First we have the root word, *just;* and this yields us the most complete set of expressions. Thus: The *just* man is he whom God *justifies.* By that divine act of *justification* the man is declared to possess *justice* in the sight of God. So our fathers would have said. Only it unfortunately happens that we cannot now use *justice* in this sense. Formerly it was good English to do so; but now justice has come to mean only a virtue of character, and not that obedience to commands which justifies from blame. Hence we have to borrow another word and say "righteousness." There would be no harm in this if we could run this word, like the other, through all the forms we need. But we cannot. We cannot well say, for example, The *righteous* man is he whom God *calls righteous;* we require to substitute the phrase, "whom God justifies."

only basis on which men can put their trust in Him. We could have no confidence in an unequal, unfair, or inconsistent judge. But if we examine St. Paul's words a little, we shall see that it cannot be this he is speaking of. For one thing, the justice of the Most High was no novelty which we needed a Gospel to reveal to us. All men knew that by nature; or if they did not, the Hebrew Law had long ago revealed it. For another thing, a revelation of God's justice would have been no Gospel for sinners—no "good tidings of great joy" to any people. It would simply have been another exhibition of that righteous wrath of God against sin which had already been revealed from heaven, and which St. Paul goes on to speak of as the antithesis or opposite of the Gospel. Besides, the justice which belongs to the nature of God does not depend (as this is said to do) on human faith. It does not spring out of men's believing. Above all, such a sense of the phrase yields no meaning at all when you apply it to the quotation from Habakkuk: "The man who is righteous (or just) by his faith, shall live." For here it is plainly man's righteousness which is spoken of—a righteousness which belongs to the just man, not to God. In whatever sense, therefore, the righteousness revealed by the Gospel can be called God's, it certainly must describe, not an attribute of the divine nature, but some condition or relation in which men themselves are made to stand.

To find out what that is we must look forward to a passage of this present letter to Rome, in which St. Paul falls back upon his thesis and repeats it in ampler and more explicit language. The passage occurs near the end of the third chapter.* At the twenty-first verse he there proceeds to sum up the results of his long dis-

* iii. 21-26.

cussion. "Now," says he, "apart from the Law, God's righteousness has been manifested"—exactly as here in i. 17 he had said it is "revealed" in the Gospel, so that the two passages are quite parallel. Then he goes on to define or describe it. It consists (iii. 24) in every sinner who believes "being justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Again (iii. 26) it is defined once more: it consists in God's "being just and the Justifier of him who believes in Jesus." On our side, it implies our being justified when we believe; on God's side, it implies His justly justifying us when we believe. It is not, therefore, an abstract virtue inherent in the Deity; but it has to do with a justified condition into which it pleases God to put men—such men as believe in the Redeemer. In this sense of the word, justice or righteousness belongs, not to the judge who condemns or acquits, but to the judged, who are acquitted and not condemned. A judge is righteous (or just) who pronounces a true sentence upon the merits of the case, whether he acquit or condemn. In this sense alone can God be righteous or possess righteousness. But the accused subject who stands to be judged is righteous (or just) only when the sentence passed on him turns out to be one of acquittal. This is the sense in which a man may be righteous, or possessed of righteousness.

The Pauline use of the word, then, as we interpret him, is this: Righteousness is the condition of any man's being justified, vindicated in law, or acquitted of blame, by his righteous Judge. And the characteristic of the Gospel—its joy and glory—lies here, that it has revealed how that condition of our justification has been reached. It shows by what means God may be just and yet justify the sinner. We are quite familiar with this sense of justification in ordinary human life. It is the simple

opposite of condemnation; as our Lord said, "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." And there have never been wanting plenty of people who (like a certain man in the Gospel) are "willing to justify themselves." Any one who is misrepresented or calumniated may succeed in clearing himself from blame by a justification of his conduct. Nay, so far as regards condemnation at the bar of earthly justice or of human opinion, there are some righteous men who can defy their accusers to convict them of open guilt, that is, who may claim to be justified from sin. But to be just in Heaven's esteem, to claim acquittal at the Divine Bar, to have a righteousness which God can recognize and on the footing of which God will justify a man—this was, when Paul wrote, a new thing on the earth. It had been foretold, foreshadowed, and looked forward to; but it had never before been revealed. It needed to be revealed, in the proper sense of a divine or supernatural making known of what is concealed; for of its own nature it was absolutely undiscoverable. The question, "How shall man be just with God?" was for man an unanswerable question. Human consciousness was always a consciousness of sin. Or if, in any particular, any man could dare to say (like Paul himself in one place), "I am conscious of no fault in myself," he had to add, with the humility of ignorance, "Yet am I not hereby justified; but He that judgeth me is the Lord." Every human law (like the law of Exod. xxiii. 7) forbids a judge to "justify the wicked"—to discharge a criminal from the tribunal uncondemned. Yet this is precisely what St. Paul declares that God does. He "justifieth the ungodly" (Rom. iv. 5). There is "now no condemnation" (viii. 1). How or on what ground this seemingly unjust acquittal of sinners can proceed was a secret hid from

past ages, but it is now revealed. Such a righteousness for man as will sustain in the case of any one a verdict of acquittal from "the righteous Judge" is the grand discovery of the Gospel. By its disclosure of that for the trustful acceptance of mankind, it becomes a message with power unto salvation.

(2.) We are now in a position to see in what sense this righteousness revealed in the Gospel is *God's*. Man's it certainly is, or must become, in the sense of constituting a ground on which man may justly be acquitted of guilt. But man's, as his own moral act, it as certainly is not. For it is expressly contrasted with what Paul called "mine own righteousness;" and the Jews missed finding it just because they went about to establish one of "their own." So far as the personal acts of any sinner are concerned, the whole argument of this Epistle and the whole New Testament emphatically set aside the notion of his acquittal depending on any righteousness of his own. The Gospel righteousness, therefore, originates from God in the first instance—is a superhuman and supernatural provision of His grace which men were so far from being able to find or make, that they could not even imagine it till it was revealed to them. It is God's in its inception; for He it was—the Father of all mercy—who in the beginning, when we were "yet sinners," "enemies" of His, and "without strength," "sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law," to "condemn our sin in His flesh," and redeem us from the law's sentence of condemnation. It is God's in its achievement; for He it was—the Son of the Father—who in the fulness of time "made many righteous by His own obedience," and "by His blood justified" us from all things, obliterating the writing which accused us, and "reconciling us in the body of His flesh through death." It is God's in its revelation;

for He it was—the Holy Spirit who comforts us by His teaching—who first through the Apostles of our Lord discovered it to all nations for the obedience of faith. Wherefore "to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever." Praised be the wise and generous mercy of the Father who devised; praised be the obedience and grace of the Son whose mortal passion achieved; and praised the comforting revelation of the Spirit who still within our hearts makes known to us this righteousness of faith:—God's righteousness for sinful men!

(3.) In the composite title given by St. Paul to the contents of his Gospel, there remains but one more word to be explained. He calls it—in full—"God's righteousness of (or, *out of*) faith;" and this expression may most fitly be read as if it were one compound epithet descriptive of a single object. Each of the parts of this compound name has its own separate use, if one would adequately characterize what the Gospel reveals to us. It is a "righteousness," because on it the acquittal of accused and sinful men justly proceeds. It is "God's-righteousness," because provided by the Triune God through the human obedience of the Second Person. It is "God's-righteousness-of-faith," because, in order to our becoming justified by it, faith is the solitary condition. The relation of Gospel righteousness is thus expressed by its very name, on both sides—toward God and toward man. As respects God, it is *His*, in a sense opposed to its being mine; His as its Author, Originator, meritorious Achiever, and proper Proprietor. The simple personal possessive marks His relation to it: it is "*God's.*" But as respects my relation to it—it comes to me, stands me in stead, is reckoned to me for my acquittal, "*by faith,*" in consequence (that is to say) of my believing in and trusting to Him. The expression, "by faith," stands exactly opposed to another often recur-

ring in St. Paul: "by law-works" (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, iii. 20), that is, personal acts of obedience, carrying with them some merit in God's sight. It is, of course, conceivable (though it is practically impossible) that sinful men should do something in their own person to clear or justify themselves from guilt—something to atone for sin, or to deserve acquittal. If they could, that righteousness would be their own—not another's in any sense; not God's. And it would be a righteousness arising to them out of their own actions, "out of law-works" done by them. In sharp contrast to this self-provided righteousness stands the Gospel righteousness provided by Another. It comes to me, not out of any act or work of mine by which I have justified myself, but out of my reliance on the act or work of Another, by which Another justifies me. Just because this righteousness is Another's, it can only be made available for me by my relying upon that Other and accepting it as a gratuitous present from His kindness. (Cf. ἡ δωρεὰ ἐν χάριτι, Rom. v. 15.) Because it is God's, it comes to me out of faith; and it is "out of faith, that it may be by grace" (Rom. iv. 16).

Thus it is that the whole of this composite title, "God's-righteousness-by-faith," hangs together and receives one consistent sense. It is at every point the clear contrary to "Man's-righteousness-by-works;" and accordingly the Apostle's efforts through nearly three following chapters are directed to abolish the latter, that he may establish the former and shut us up to accept of it. If it can be shown that by the deeds of the law can no man be justified before God, then it will follow that any justifying righteousness available for us must be a righteousness not ours, but God's; which comes to our account, not on our doing it, but on our trusting to it as our Saviour's deed. And it is just such a righteousness which in the Gospel is revealed unto us.

This discussion of the terms of the text may appear to some unduly long; but there are no words in the peculiar vocabulary of Christianity to which a greater importance attaches than these. The teaching of the New Testament on the way of salvation turns on them as on a pivot, and they issue, as we shall presently see, in an urgent practical demand. Besides, through what has been said upon the words of the text, we have really reached to its very ideas and central meaning. So much so, that little remains to do now but in a few words to recapitulate the thoughts which have emerged as we went along.

Let us see how these come out.

(1.) A message which pretends (as the Gospel does) to have the power of saving sinful men must show how men are to be justified or acquitted by God. The very first fact to confront any would-be deliverer of human beings is, that we are all guilty and deserve to perish. We are under sentence for sin. We are righteously condemned to die. Till you can lift off from the human conscience that appalling, remorseful load of guilt, with its paralyzing sense of hopelessness, and its exasperating fear of the blessed God as an incensed avenging Judge, you have done nothing—nothing effectual—for any earnest religious nature. To reverse the doom of the race, cancel our sentence, and reinstate us in the approval of Heaven, is the very alphabet of our salvation.

(2.) Only some supernatural revelation could do this. Many things men could and did find out, but atonement for guilt, or a good and just cause why any one who had once broken the law of God should not die but live, as if he had kept it—this no man could find. If there never had come any other true message sent down by a miracle from above or spoken by the very voice of God, this must be such a message. How can I trust the clever guesses

of any man about the terms on which the Almighty will acquit me of my sin? He must speak and tell me.

(3.) The way of justifying sinners which this heavenly message does reveal is by a righteousness of God's own providing. Obedience is rendered to magnify the broken Law; its sentence of death is satisfied; guilt is abolished by atonement; a just basis for pardon is laid:—but the doing of all this is not ours, it is God's. It is a righteousness accomplished for each man, not by himself, but by Another; by no sinful man, yet by a Man; by a Man, and yet by God. The miracle of the incarnation introduced into our race a Divine Actor whose obedient passion solves the problem of sin, and achieves the task of righteousness. On that flesh which bore the "likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. viii. 3), and stood "for sin," "God condemned sin" till there was "no more condemnation." The flesh of our Rescuer "was delivered over" indeed to death for the expiation of "our offences," but it "was raised again" from death "because of our justification" (iv. 25).

It follows from the nature of this revealed ground of our acquittal that—

(4.) We have nothing to do but to build our hopes on it. To take God at His word, and rely on His revealed righteousness as the basis of our acceptance and forgiveness becomes, from the simple necessity of the case, our one way to peace. When the message is sent that God has executed a work on the footing of which He is willing to acquit and justify us from our sins, it is plain that we have nothing left us but to believe it, and act henceforth on the faith of it. Such a righteousness, being Another's work, must be (so far as we are concerned) *a righteousness to be trusted to*—a righteousness of faith.

Here, then, we reach the last thought, which is really the

point of the whole, that to which all tends, and by which the Gospel reaches us, touches us, and pierces our heart. It is this:—

(5.) This message from God in heaven about a provided righteousness by reliance upon which we may be justified, is sent to us for this very end—*that we should rely on it.* For thus saith the Apostle: "In the Gospel message God's righteousness, which is by faith, is revealed *to faith*," *i.e.*, revealed on purpose to be trusted in. This benevolent and serious design of God in revealing His *faith-righteousness* makes this Gospel word a sword with a double edge to every one among us. For God did not simply reveal His righteousness to His wide world—"to the Jew first and also to the Greek." He has guided the actual course of its disclosure along the great lines of history; guided it to our shores; guided it down the current of our ancestral generations; guided it in spoken and written words to our door, to our eye and ear, to our mind and spirit. To us He has as literally and pointedly revealed it as if, in our secret closet, God's voice from heaven had spoken to each one by name, disclosing, for our individual salvation, a secret concealed from every other man—this namely, that Christ's work is a righteousness for *you*, by which, if you trust to it, you shall be justified. His purpose in telling you that? His meaning? His wish? That you—you yourself—should believe it for yourself and be saved! Oh! the unspeakable stress of the divine heart against our own, when He, who passes sentence on sin, who also died to put sin away, comes right up against each with this personal message, that, if we will only lean on His righteous work, we shall live. No one can mistake the meaning of that communication. You may refuse, but you cannot misunderstand, God. He means you to put your trust in the ground of acquittal

revealed to you. He means you to be saved thereby. To no soul of man among us is this way of pardon made known for a mockery, to tantalize with unattainable desire. It is revealed *to faith*, with a serious call that we would let it in and fasten our trust upon it; that we would abandon all other reason for hoping in the divine mercy, and would hope to be, nay, trust to be, nay, confidently count on being, pardoned, acquitted, justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and for the sake of His righteous work.

CHAPTER III.

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF PAGANISM.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse: because that, knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks; but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts unto uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonoured among themselves: for that they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile passions: for their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working unseemliness, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was due. And even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up unto a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, unmerciful: who, knowing the ordinance of God, that they which practise such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also consent with them that practise them."—ROM. i. 18–32.

THE writer of these words was Christ's greatest witness to the ancient world of heathendom. He was the man whom God sent to assail the overgrown system of classical

paganism. To this task he devoted the mighty labours of his life; and although, while he lived, he might seem to have effected little (for it took three centuries to develop the results of his work), yet, in fact, polytheism never recovered from the wound which it sustained at the hands of Paul. For all that, we hear very little from St. Paul about the idolatries of his time. This passage has the distinction of being the only one in which he speaks of the religious and moral condition of the heathen world at any length; almost the only one in which he speaks of its heathenism at all. Two of his sermons reported in the Acts were preached to idolaters; one to rude rustic idolaters in a Lycaonian town; the other to cultured idolaters in the city of Athens. The language which he used on both these occasions harmonizes with this passage and throws on it a helpful light. Here, however, he is writing to a capital which, as it had gathered into its hands the military and administrative power of all civilized governments, so it had provided a home for the deities of all its subject lands. In Rome's tolerant Pantheon, when Paul wrote, were assembled the gods of every land. At Rome, license was accorded to the rites of every form of worship, however impure or fraudulent. There, therefore, one might conveniently study the latest results of man's religious development, and trace in the faith and morals of its vast heterogeneous population what polytheism in every shape had been able to do for mankind. There was an appropriateness in setting before the Roman Christians so elaborate a picture as we have here of that mighty multiform paganism in the midst of which they lived and had their being.

Let it be noticed with what design the passage is introduced. In last chapter we have discussed the words in which the Apostle lays down his theme. He is to prove

that the Gospel of Christ has brought with it a novel power to save men from sin, because it reveals a way of being acquitted from condemnation by simply believing. It will prepare us for this if he can show that mankind at large need such a salvation to be revealed; that they are under condemnation for sin, and that no existing religion had succeeded in saving them from that condemnation. The Gospel, he says, reveals God's righteousness by faith. But there had been a prior "revelation" in the world of God's "wrath" against the sins of men. Under that discovery of divine displeasure the whole world lay helpless in its guilt. Before the apprehension of coming judgment from heaven, clearly enough foreshadowed already, the whole race sat dumb, self-condemned, and without hope. Prove that, and you have proved the need of a new revelation, if men are to be saved at all. Prove that, and you prove that deliverance from the doom and power of sin is the need of humanity; a need which only God Himself can supply.

So far as the Gentile or pagan world went, it hardly needed proof, to any man who lived in it, that its moral condition was infamously bad. We possess the most abundant contemporary evidence of this in its literature and its monuments. No scholar questions that the classical nations of Paul's age were steeped in vice, socially disorganized, and abandoned to unnameable forms of personal impurity. No Christian in Rome, when Paul's letter reached it, but had the evidence of this before his eyes. These things needed only to be pointed at. What most needed to be shown was the connection between heathen conduct and heathen religion, and how, for the faults of both, the heathen must be held responsible. This leads St. Paul, not simply to enumerate abominable and prevalent forms of sin, but to trace the genesis of heathen

morals out of heathen religion, and to establish the proposition, that, both for the primary religious declension or apostasy from God, and for all the frightful sins to which it had led, men were to be condemned without excuse. The whole passage is in truth a profound and inspired sketch of what I may call the natural history of heathenism; and as it is the history also of such heathenism as still to this hour faces the Church of Christ on every side of Christendom, it is by no means a needless or obsolete task to analyze the apostolic teaching in this passage.

St. Paul's first proposition is, that from the first *the heathen knew enough of God from His works to render them without excuse for not worshipping Him.*

The testimony of Nature to God was a familiar thought to St. Paul, for he uses it, as he does here, both in his sermon at Lystra and in his sermon at Athens. The Divine Being in His divine attributes is, of course, personally and essentially invisible. Yet He has impressed so much of Himself upon the visible creation that His own invisible attributes have thereby become evident to the intellectual vision of man—no less clearly evident to the understanding than if they were literally seen by the eye. The primary attribute manifested by creation is the power of God. Creation, indeed, in the strict and Biblical sense of that term (I mean, making something out of nothing), is not a truth of natural religion. It is the earliest doctrine of revelation, to be received as an article of faith. Yet in the composition and organization of matter into such innumerable forms of use, majesty, and loveliness as everywhere surround us, the world carries on its front the signature—not perhaps of infinite, but at least—of supreme and transcendent might. But mere power, though the first, is neither the last nor the best feature in that char-

acter which He who made the world has left as His mark upon it. What St. Paul calls the "divinity" of God, means the sum of His peculiar divine properties, and among these Paul himself would perhaps have signalized (as at Lystra he did signalize it) the bountiful goodness of God. Nature bears witness, no doubt, to the severity as well as to the goodness of the Power that is above. But her ordinary processes, her faithful seasons, her salutary provision for the repair of disorder, her often lavish and prodigal return to the hand of diligence, these things tell of One who is slow to anger, but who does good with both hands earnestly. Now, is it true that any candid and reverent mind might learn so much of God in this way as to lay upon it the duty of pure and grateful worship? Nay, is it not true that so much as this has actually been known by men who had no book to read in but the book of Nature? We find historical traces of this primitive nature-lesson about God in all the great polytheisms. We find behind the many gods a recognition of one supreme and remoter God. We find that the further back we can track pagan faiths, the simpler and purer they appear to become. We find the strongest testimonies to God's unity and to His attributes, with a ritual comparatively pure, in the oldest sacred books of the heathen, in the Vedas, for example, and in the earliest classics of China. Even under a later and more developed polytheism, the tendency of the deepest and most unbiassed thinkers has been towards a truer conception of God than the popular one. These things afford support to the Apostle's fundamental position, that Nature has always told enough of its Maker to the intelligence of man to make him inexcusable if he did not pay to the One True God the fitting tribute of adoring praise and affectionate gratitude.

But, secondly, the Apostle declares that *the heathen have*

culpably repressed and hindered from its just influence the truth which they did know respecting God. He traces polytheistic and idolatrous worship to its root.

(1.) Its first origin he finds in a refusal to walk honestly by such light as Nature afforded. For this primary step in the very old and very fatal path of religious declension (a path trodden by the earliest fathers of our existing races in days long antecedent to the dawn of history) men could excuse themselves under no plea of ignorance. As yet, false divinities had not been invented. Cruel theologies had not become traditional. The large, fair page of a fresh young world lay all before them, with no misleading glosses, and from it was reflected the blessed face of a Father in heaven, One strong and just and kind. Men with good hearts in them would have loved and praised the God of earth and heaven. The bulk of men did not. They withheld from God the righteous return of honour and affection due to Him for what they really knew of Him. They neither paid Him worship as God, nor gave Him thanks. By thus refusing to let the truth rule them and work out its legitimate moral and religious effects upon them, they took the earliest step in a swift and easy apostasy.

(2.) The next step followed surely. All such "holding back," or repression of acknowledged truth, in unrighteousness, has this for its penalty, that the eye for truth itself becomes evil. So it proved. That truth about God's real nature and properties, which men would not strive fairly to express in their worship, became obscured. Vanity and error entered into human reasonings on religion. The relations of God to His natural works grew confused. Instead of the clear straightforward vision of an honest heart, there came speculations, guesses, fictions, and would-be wise inventions of the intellect. More and

more the great God whom they would not worship was thrust back out of popular thought, and His place taken by a crowd of subordinate divinities—personified powers of Nature or deified heroes of mythical history. God can only be rightly known so long as He is faithfully served and loved. The wicked, fallen heart did not think it fit to retain such a practical acquaintance with God as that; and it paid the penalty in the falsification of its ideas about God, and the consequent darkening of its whole moral and religious life. "Men became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened."

(3.) The third step downward was practical folly in religion. Wisdom rests on truth; but when the truth of God has been rejected for vain inventions of man's own, there remains—self-conceit, indeed, in a baseless pretence of wisdom (misnamed philosophy), but at bottom utter, abject unwisdom—that deep incredible folly in the profoundest of all human affairs, of which pagan idolatry has been everywhere the melancholy monument. The rejection of the true God, whom His works proclaim, led to the gradual banishment of Him out of mind, and the elevation into His room of the personified powers of Nature—that is, of His own works erected into divinities in His stead. Nature-worship involved symbol-worship. Symbol worship rapidly degenerated into sheer idol-worship. Then the folly culminated. When men can bow down to a dead, dumb image of their own making, and that the image of nothing nobler or greater than themselves, but of a brute, as in Assyria, India, or Egypt, or at best of another man, as in Greece; when the quadruped, the fowl, the reptile, is enshrined in the place of God, revered with the honours of God, and besought for the blessings of God, as if its foul and mean similitude could be any likeness of the Eternal Incorruptible Framer of all things,

surely a stage has been reached in human senselessness which degrades the worshipper as much as it insults his God. Yet this is but the legitimate penalty, as it has been the natural and universal result, of that primeval sin which refused to glorify as He deserved the God whose glory shone on man from the works that His fingers framed. It was quite in the spirit of Paul's reasoning when Isaiah pleaded with the besotted idolater that he would open his eyes and consider in his heart. In a voice which is not audible, and yet goes throughout the earth, the heavens do proclaim God's glory. In these heavens which God stretched forth alone—on the earth which He spread abroad by Himself, any man might discover enough to save him from setting up the wood of a graven image, or praying to a god that cannot save, if only "a deceived heart" had not first turned him aside."

In the third place, *it is in this deplorable and criminal perversion of the truth, this religious apostasy, that Paul finds a key to the personal and social vices of heathendom.* It is not simply that the ancient pagan idolatries were themselves polluted. It is true that they deified lust and cruelty and fraud; true, that they set up lewd and foul images; true, that they enjoined rites which were bloody and licentious; true, that to be pious it was needful to be impure. But this was not all. Such general abandonment to vice, till the very distinction of good and evil became confounded, was a divine retribution on man for his abandonment of God. When the human heart shut out the self-manifestation of the true God, refused to know Him, and worshipped base creatures in His room, it cut itself off by its own act from the source of moral light and moral strength. A bad and false religion must breed a bad and false character. The worshippers grow like their divinity. You may call this a law of human nature, if

you like, for it is that; but it is no less a law of the Divine Governor who made human nature; and the execution of it may be described as His just deed. He it is who has decreed, and takes care that the decree be executed, that, where men turn from Him to idols, their moral vision shall become dark and their moral taste false. Therefore, says St. Paul, both sins against personal purity and sins against social justice grew upon the pagan world as a direct and frightful penalty for its root sin of idolatrous departure from God. They "changed the glory of God into an image"—"*wherefore,* God also gave them up to uncleanness"—such uncleanness as dare not be explained in the clean ears of Christian men and women. Yes, "for this cause," he repeats; because they exchanged the truth of God for the lie of creature-worship. It was "the recompense of their error which was due." Moreover, "even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, so God gave them up unto a reprobate mind," to be "filled with all unrighteousness." The long dark catalogue of sins against society, sins of spite and fraud and heartlessness and inhumanity, with which St. Paul closes his dismal picture of heathen life as he knew it, might readily be paralleled, no doubt, by scattered instances drawn from Christian lands. But it is not the existence of envy, murder, or deceit which is cast up against heathendom, but the prevalence of these and similar sins. It is that heathen society was full of them, to an extent which it is happily difficult for us to conceive; that the moral sense of society had been by false religions so debased that the grossest sins awoke little notice and scarcely any censure; that, in fact, men not only did such things but consented with those who practised them.

Out of this analysis of the genesis and guilt of

heathenism several points arise which carry with them a practical lesson.

In the first place, St. Paul leaves it plain that, among the heathen, equally with Jews or Christians, the root sin of all and the secret of guilt lay in wilful unfaithfulness to such religious light as they had. The knowledge of God possessed by the heathen never was to be compared of course with that of men who enjoyed a positive supernatural revelation; still, it was knowledge of the truth, so far as it went, and they were to blame for repressing it through unrighteousness. The nations chose to forget God. As generations passed, to be sure, the lies which grew up and became venerable covered out of sight every trace of that primitive but forgotten knowledge, and made it increasingly difficult for even the wisest heathen to find the true God, even supposing them to seek Him and feel after Him. One's heart grows very sore for those few noble lovers of the light, whose pathetic, hopeless yearning for a purer faith amid the night of paganism, makes the darkness in which they dwelt only the more dark. Still, the testimony of God's works to God was not a testimony that spoke once and then was dumb. From age to age, in the ears of each new generation, the heavens and the earth had their old message to repeat. Nor could the wise and witty and ingenious pagan races have gone as they did, from bad to worse, into crasser superstition, into fouler indulgence, unless there had been a continual turning away of the evil heart from such faint light as did shine, and a continual loving and choosing of the dark. The history of heathendom, old and new, is a history of deterioration; and the key to that deterioration is the prevailing bias of the human heart against God as He really and truly is.

It ought never therefore to be forgotten, in the next

place, that heathenism is not simply a misfortune in the world for which the bulk of men are to be pitied, but not blamed. It is a crime—a huge, next to world-wide, age-long crime, with its roots in a deep hatred of God, and bearing a prolific crop of utterly inexcusable and hideous vices. To prove this is the very end for which the passage is introduced by St. Paul. His object is to exhibit the absolute necessity for the Gospel as a divine revelation of a new way to be saved. So far as the great majority of our race—its pagan portion—was concerned, man was sunk deep in sin, out of which his own religion could so little extricate him, that it was just his own self-chosen religion of lies which had plunged him deeply into it. Apart from the Gospel there is neither salvation nor any hope of it for mankind. Heathenism at least has none to offer. We need to remember this in order to guard ourselves against that shallow and very modern liberalism which thinks all religions respectable and loves to extol heathen virtues as a set off to Christian pretensions. We need to remember it that we may adequately admire the patience of Eternal Justice, which has borne through long ages with the ceaseless insults of polytheism against God, with the self-degradation of the idolater, and with the unspeakable iniquity perpetrated in the name of religion. We need to remember it, above all, that we may have our compassion more profoundly stirred over those vast populations who to this very hour sit, where they have always sat, in "the region of the shadow of death," amid the "gross darkness" which covers the nations. I say "our compassion." To be convinced that the worship of idols and false gods is a sin which loads the worshipper with guilt and paves the way for other sins:—this does not make the heart less pitiful or less eager to deliver our brothers. On the contrary, it is the latitudinarian theory

which thinks that we have a deal to learn from paganism, and that pagans run as fair a chance of heaven as we do, which really steels the soul against pity and chills missionary zeal. No: to feel that heathen rites are a standing outrage against the Most High; to burn for His honour who is dethroned that dead men and brute beasts and fictitious monsters may take His place; to have one's spirit stirred, like Paul's own at Athens, because the fairest and most populous regions of the globe are still wholly given to idolatry; to realise that heathenism to-day means as much as ever the apostacy of souls from God, the darkening of human hearts, the turning of men into fools, the abandonment of whole races to vile affections; and to remember with an awful horror of soul that for these things God will bring men into judgment: this is not to quench charity and humanity (God forbid!), but rather to enkindle in the soul a consuming, unappeasable compassion; such a compassion as in every age has made of earnest men missionaries and martyrs, and has taught the heralds of truth and mercy, with yearnings like those of God's missionary Son and a self-sacrificing love kindled at His own, to endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain salvation.

But for the signal grace of God to our fathers in sending to these shores His Christian Gospel, we had been to-day part and parcel of heathendom. He alone has made Englishmen to differ. The responsibility on us is not just a responsibility for the faithful use of Christian light and Christian grace, lest having had the greater privilege we end by incurring the greater guilt. No, not that only —though all heathendom, from Pekin to Patagonia, should rise in judgment to rebuke us. But on us there lies the tremendous obligation to give what we have received and as we have received; to pity as we have been pitied,

teach what we have been taught, and by God's help save others—we who have been saved ourselves. What do I say? "The tremendous obligation!" Ought I not to have said, the supreme privilege and blessedness? that for sake of which England is, and for sake of helping in which it is worth while to be an English Christian? Verily, to us of all nations has been entrusted a stewardship of the Gospel. Woe unto us if we preach not the Gospel! But what shall be our honour and reward, if English adventure, English commerce, and English gold, prove to be pioneers or aids to English Christianity, in its task of bringing light to those "dark places of the earth" which are full to this hour of "habitations of cruelty!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRACTICAL OUTCOME OF JUDAISM.

"Wherefore thou art without excuse, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest dost practise the same things. And we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against them that practise such things. And reckonest thou this, O man, who judgest them that practise such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up for thyself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his works: to them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and incorruption, eternal life: but unto them that are factious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, shall be wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that worketh evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greek; but glory and honour and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek: for there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned under law shall be judged by law; for not the hearers of a law are just before God, but the doers of a law shall be justified: for when Gentiles which have no law do by nature the things of the law, these, having no law, are a law unto themselves; in that they shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ. But if thou bearest the name of a Jew, and restest upon the law, and gloriest in God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them that are in darkness, a correcter of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having in the law the form of knowledge and of the truth; thou therefore that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?

thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou rob temples? thou who gloriest in the law, through thy transgression of the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles, because of you, even as it is written. For circumcision indeed profiteth, if thou be a doer of the law: but if thou be a transgressor of the law, thy circumcision is become uncircumcision. If therefore the uncircumcision keep the ordinances of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be reckoned for circumcision? and shall not the uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who with the letter and circumcision art a transgressor of the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."—ROM. ii.

IN order to lay a basis for his exhibition of the Gospel as the revelation of a novel and much-needed way of justification for sinful men, St. Paul has undertaken in this section of his letter (i. 18 to iii. 20) to show that as yet no existing faith or religion among men had succeeded in saving them from condemnation; that in truth, the previous history of religion, both among pagans and among Jews, had been a revelation only of divine anger against sin, since all the light which either the religion of Nature or the religion of revealed Law could shed upon the moral wastes of humanity, was a light that rebuked, exposed and judged, not a light that cleared or justified the sinner.

So far as the heathen nations were concerned, St. Paul has traced their religious development in the latter half of the first chapter. He has taught that even pagans learned enough from the unassisted lessons of creation to have kept them in the worship of the true God had they faithfully used their light; that polytheism and idolatry were the result of a culpable refusal to walk by the teachings of natural religion, or to honour God so far as they knew Him; and that those unmentionable vices with which heathen society was stained, with the social disintegration which marked the Empire,

were a natural and righteous retribution for such perversion of truth. Paganism therefore had run its downward course to the bottom. In it was to be found no salvation. Such light as it possessed served only to "reveal the wrath of God against the unrighteousness of men."

From this melancholy sketch of the Gentile nations and their religious history, St. Paul turns his eyes to that solitary people which formed in his day an antithesis to paganism. It was the boast of the Jew that he alone lived in the light and walked in the way of righteousness. To this tribe of Hebrews, set in the focus of contending empires and divinely guarded through two thousand years of noble ancestry, God had given what to the rest of the earth had been denied, the aid of supernatural teaching. To them God had discovered Himself, not by obscure inference from the visible creation, but by plain speech and miraculous acts and a whole economy of elaborate instruction. The unity, the spirituality, the justice, the holiness, the glory of the Divine Being had been burnt into the faith of Israel by many a fiery lesson. They knew His will. He had set before them a way of life. He had given them His "Law." For He had not only summed up all ethical duties in the Ten Words—that was but the kernel of the Law given by Moses—He had minutely prescribed every religious and social obligation, whether of a personal or of a national character. The due observance of these was believed to commend each Israelite to Jehovah's favour, and to constitute his passport into the everlasting kingdom of the just. The Temple ritual might be cumbrous and costly. The Levitical rules might interfere in a multitude of vexatious ways with the freedom of private life. The singularity of his manners might expose every travelled Jew to perpetual remark and not a

little derision. No matter: these things were his pride; because they marked his selection by Jehovah for exceptional honour. They sealed him as a favourite of Heaven. They were the path which led him to the paradise of saints, to the life everlasting.

Himself a Hebrew of the Hebrews, St. Paul's early training had made him the last man to underprize the privileges of his race. His conversion to Christianity had not abated by one jot the grateful pride with which he looked back upon the ancient glories of his nation. But one thing he had discovered at his conversion. His eyes had been opened to see—and the sight made the whole world new to him—that "the Law" was not, and never could be to any Hebrew, a way to righteousness. In the possession of that Law, and in the keeping of it, he saw his fellow-countrymen pursuing, as they fancied, after righteousness with God, acceptance in His sight, and a life of glory and reward at last. They were doing with infinite zeal, and some of them with unsuspecting assurance, precisely what he himself had done before God opened his own eyes—building their hope of everlasting life on their Jewish birth and on a punctilious attention to the formalities of Jewish law. If they were right in that, then his Gospel of gratuitous acceptance through trust in Christ was a superfluity and a mistake. But the test of the Jews' pretensions lay to hand, in the facts of Jewish life. Did the morals of his countrymen, then, fit them to stand before the righteous tribunal of eternal justice? Had they so kept their boasted Law as to attain by it to practical righteousness? Let the observation of the Roman world reply. The appeal is a rough and ready one—fit for the occasion. In his own case, to be sure, Paul's Hebrew life had been outwardly pure. Like a good many of his nobler contemporaries, especially

among the Palestine schools, he could accuse himself of no patent vices. If he had learnt how impotent was an external law to secure inward purity, it had only been through the hidden working of evil desire within his soul. Here, however, he is writing to a community familiar with foreign Jews resident in a heathen city—resident in that city where of all others upon earth the basest elements from every land flowed together to make one another worse: and he could appeal to the observation of Roman Christians whether the Jews of Rome were not as bad in morals as any pagan—nay, whether the very name of Jew had not come to be on Gentile lips a word of opprobrium and reproach.

I proceed to analyse with a little more detail this careful and remarkable piece of reasoning, by which, through a whole chapter, St. Paul labours to convict his countrymen of lying under the same righteous judgment for sin as the heathen, in spite of their boasted possession of the Law.

It takes the form throughout of an argumentative address directed against an imaginary opponent. The inspired advocate for the Gospel has before him an ideal or typical Jew, who concentrates in himself the most characteristic features of Jewish life as they presented themselves in the Apostolic age. This typical Jew is a confident, conceited and censorious bigot, who makes a great deal of his superior enlightenment as one of the instructed nation. On the strength of his knowing what is right so much better than the heathen, he sets himself up as the judge of his heathen neighbours. He is severe on their profligacy, idolatry and dishonesty. He clearly sees that over Gentile sinners there impends a fearful doom for their evil lives. But though not a whit purer

in morals than they, it never occurs to him to apprehend any real or impartial judgment of God on his own evil life. From that he deems himself secure on the ground of his national privileges, as a pure-blooded, circumcised child of the covenant. He bears on his flesh, as he thinks, a seal or pledge of his own hereditary exemption from that strict reckoning and appalling retribution at the hands of eternal justice, which he is not slow to predict against the uncircumcised nations of the outside world.

At the root of such a state of mind as this, there must always lie, though it may be unconsciously, a feeling that God is partial in His judgments. The first thing, accordingly, on which St. Paul lays anxious stress is this:—

(1.) The judgment of God according to men's works is just, inevitable and impartial (verses 2–11). It is a judgment according to works which the Jew ought, on theory, to challenge. For he seeks to be saved by a "law"—that is, by a thing to be done. If he is to be justified at all, it must be through the coincidence of his life with that rule of living which God gave to his nation and on which he plumes himself. That very sign of the covenant in his flesh in which he trusts, is a pledge on his part that he will keep the Law. His reliance, therefore, is not on divine mercy, but on divine justice. Yet he forgets that the same justice which he invokes or denounces against the heathen sinner must, to be justice at all, smite him equally who is an equal sinner (ver. 3). Every one knows, even without any special help from revelation, that the judgment of God against the evil-doer is "according to truth," true to the facts (ver. 2); and His judgment is inescapable and universal. It is true that it is a deferred judgment. We do not yet see, in this present life, nor so long as this present

era runs shall we ever see, the return which the tremendous Judge and Vindicator of all is to render to the actions of men. That *dies iræ*, which is to reveal God's righteous judgment, is meanwhile held back, impendent over the forgetful and unheeding earth. But it is surely putting a miserable misconstruction upon this delay, to think that delay means final escape! This is to misread and to abuse the generosity of the Judge. Delay means forbearance and longsuffering. It comes of the rich goodness of His heart who would have no man to be lost, but would hold out to every one of us a place and a season for repentance. Each day the golden sun arises on this foul earth to look afresh upon its knavery and cruelty and profanity, and reaches its western bed without being blotted out of heaven by the no longer patient cloud of the Almighty's anger, is a fresh angel of goodness, summoning the spared race to repent, with the old urgent cry of divine solicitude and inextinguishable pity: "Why will ye die?" To harden one's soul in guilty impenitence just because God prolongs one's opportunity of repenting, or dream that judgment, long escaped, may be escaped for ever, is not only to "despise" the goodness of God, it is positively to turn it into a curse. It is to pile up against oneself huger and huger stores of wrath at the back of that forbearance which now indeed banks them up in reserve and holds them back from overflow, but which, once the day has come, will let them go, to repay with "tribulation and anguish" every soul of man that doeth evil (verses 4–9).

This delay on God's part to judge is itself a hint that by his deeds no man can be saved. Its tendency and design are to lead towards repentance; towards a consciousness of guilt, or even an evangelical despair of being justified by law, and a resort in consequence to that mercy

of God which justifies us through faith in Him. But if, encouraged by delay, a man continues impenitent, he provokes or challenges the judgment according to his deeds. This judgment according to his deeds he shall have; and it will be "without respect of persons." Impenitent men who have been alike in their deeds must be alike at last in their condemnation.

(2.) So far St. Paul has merely been laying down an abstract theory of the divine impartiality in retribution. He has not yet spoken of the Hebrew "Law." He does not at first name Jew or Gentile.* He addresses his antagonist simply as a man who presumes to judge others for sins of which he himself is no less guilty. At this point, however, he begins to regard his reader as a Jew, separated from the unclean and ignorant heathen by his privileged standing under the Mosaic Law; only, instead of recognising the difference which this creates as telling in the Jew's favour, he unexpectedly turns it against him. It gives him nothing but a fatal pre-eminence in guilt and judgment.

The Jew is right in believing that he and the pagan do not occupy one level. He is right when he claims priority over his heathen neighbours. Even when a Jew and a Gentile sin the same sins, they still hold a very different position in God's eye; they stand under distinct categories. The Gentile sins "without law," as St. Paul puts it; and the Jew "in the Law."† That is, every sin of the latter was committed within the sacred bounded circle of privileged Hebrew life, whose characteristic was that it was encompassed and overshadowed by divine legislation; all, to its very details, cared for, prescribed, and hallowed by the express orders of Jehovah. In full knowledge of what

* This is not done till ver. 9. † See ver. 12. *ἀνόμως* and *ἐν νόμῳ*.

Jehovah commanded and in defiance of every obligation to obey, the Jewish sinner sinned his sin. Whereas when a pagan sinner did the very same act, he did it outside of the Law, as a stranger to the light which God had cast on conduct and to the ties by which He had bound His people to duty. There was unquestionably a mighty difference between the same act done by these two men; and to be impartial, judgment must take notice of that difference. So indeed it will. Judgment when it comes will respect the priority of the Jew. It will begin with him first. The higher platform on which he sinned will be the higher platform on which he shall be judged. The unhappy pagan offender had just enough of the rudiments of ethical duty written in his heart and attested by the accusations of his own conscience to leave him indeed without excuse (verse 15). Condemned by that law which his own nature furnished to him,* he shall perish "without Law" of Moses. But the privileged citizen of that favoured polity, whose fence and boast was the divine Law given to Moses, must (to be fairly judged) be judged "*by that Law;*" by its clearer light, by its loftier morality, by its stricter requirements, by its more sacred and more awful sanctions. It is a miserable delusion, therefore, to fancy that the privilege of hearing God tell us our duty, lifts us above responsibility for doing it, or sets us beyond the reach of judgment for not doing it. Nay: it only confers on us, if we sin, a shameful pre-eminence in sinfulness, and, when we are judged, a fatal priority of condemnation.

(3.) All through the present discussion, St. Paul has taken it for granted that the essence of criminality lies in unfaithfulness to known duty. Again and again he

* Ver. 12: ἑαυτοῖς εἰσὶν νόμος.

has let it appear that the divine judgments on human transgression repose on this principle that (as St. James puts it): "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." On this principle he has explained the guilt of heathenism. It lay here, that when men "knew God, they glorified Him not," but "held down the truth in unrighteousness." On this principle he has described the aggravated criminality of those later pagans of the debased classical period, who, "knowing the ordinance of God, that they which practise" social enormities "are worthy of death, not only do the same but also consent with them that practise them." On the same principle, he now (ver. 17 ff.) turns that very knowledge of the Law on which his Jewish countryman relied, into a weapon against him: "Wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself."

We who look on the outside of human life, and see how unequal is the knowledge of duty possessed by different classes in society, but cannot see how far in any given case sin is the result of knowledge withstood and inward light quenched or refused, do not attempt to apply this rule to one another. So far as we are concerned, its true application as a test by which to measure the moral guilt of men must for the most part be left to that tremendous "day of revelation," when "God shall judge the secrets of men" by that accurate Searcher of motives and impartial Weigher of actions—Jesus Christ. It was otherwise with such persons as St. Paul had here in his eye, the typical Jews of his own age. For one thing, their sins were patent enough. That dispersion of the Hebrew race which was finally consummated at the fall of Jerusalem a few years after St. Paul wrote this letter, had begun as early as their captivity. It had been furthered by the conquests of Alexander and the wars of his successors.

When Paul wrote it had made the Jew as familiar a figure in every great city of the empire as in Tiberias or Cesarea. Perhaps they were not the worst of the nation who migrated to foreign cities; but they soon sank as a class to the lowest level. A vagrant life, association with the servile population of great towns, an equivocal position in the eye of Roman law, social exclusion from intercourse with Gentiles, the necessity of living by their wits and amassing bullion instead of stable property, these causes were already at work, creating that deteriorated type of Hebrew character which has long been fixed in Europe. From independent witnesses we know that the Jew was at that day the gipsy, the usurer, the fortune-teller, the pander, and the slave agent of the Roman world; everywhere living on the vices of the heathen whom he despised; one of the most restless, turbulent and despicable elements in that corrupt society. In the pages of Latin satirists and historians the Jew figures just as he does on this page of St. Paul. A thief, an adulterer, a trafficker in idolatrous gains, bringing Jehovah's name into contempt throughout heathendom; the picture is dark enough (verses 21–24). This is what had come of Israel's religious privileges and ancestral glories. This was the upshot of its national attempt to attain to the righteousness of God by the works of "the Law." Ignorant of God's righteousness, or of any other way to justification but through their own merits, their religious history had worked itself out and the end was this! An open rupture betwixt profession and performance, betwixt religion and morals; on one side, a faith which was mocked by their life; on the other, a life which was condemned by their faith. For while in morals they were a byword even to heathens, these same Jews of the Dispersion were eaten up with religious self-importance,

and looked down upon heathens as outcasts and unclean. Your Jew considered all men who worshipped idols as "foolish" and "blind," mere "babes" in religious knowledge, whom it was his mission to lead, to teach and to enlighten (verses 19, 20). Arrogant and bigoted zeal for proselytizing went hand in hand, therefore, with personal profligacy. It was nothing to be a cheat or a procurer to the basest passions; it was everything to know the true God whom Gentiles did not know, to be circumcised into His covenant and instructed carefully in His Law in the Sabbath synagogue (verses 17, 18). Hearing the Law had parted company with the doing of it. Israel's glory had become the witness to Israel's disgrace.

It would be a grave mistake to say that as Christians we hold in the modern world a parallel place to that of Israel in the world which Paul knew. St. Paul's contention is that the position of Christians is in some sense precisely the reverse. The Jew failed as egregiously as the pagan to attain to a justifying righteousness before God, because he possessed only a Law which gave him the knowledge of sin without giving any power to vanquish sin. Just because the Law thus failed to justify or to regenerate mankind, does St. Paul produce, as with blast of a herald's trumpet, his Gospel of free acquittal by faith, a Gospel with a divine power in it to do what neither paganism nor Judaism did to save sinful men. It is when he has cleared the ground of earlier systems by demonstrating their practical failure on the stage of history, that St. Paul introduces the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ. Christianity is something else than a new code of morals, replacing the old one. Rather, viewed as a message of salvation, Christianity is the antithesis of Judaism —the superseder and the substitute of its "Law." Having

tried both the light of Nature and the better light of revealed Law, and proved itself incompetent to walk in its own strength, mankind is shut up to this humiliating result, that, unless we are saved by another strength and justified by another righteousness than our own, we can neither be saved nor justified at all, but must meet the day of judgment in our guilt. By grace, if at all, must men be saved; and the salvation which is by grace is the discovery of Paul's Gospel.

Yet it is possible for Christians so far to mistake the nature of their own Gospel as to take it, after all, for just another law of righteousness, like the Mosaic system. Christianity has its moral precepts too. It has its guarded circle of outward privilege. It has in the room of circumcision, baptism, and for the Passover, the Eucharist, and for the synagogue, the Church. So that it is perfectly possible for us to pride ourselves on our exceptionally enlightened and privileged position as Christians, or to trust for acceptance before God to our Christian position, as the Jew trusted to his. But by the deeds of Christian law can a man be as little justified as by the deeds of Moses' law; by baptism and the church as little saved as by circumcision and the synagogue. The Gospel is not a "law" of life, but a message of pardon; not a thing to be done, but a word to be believed; not salvation by privilege, but salvation by grace. It is Christ who saves, not our Christianity. Christ saves by what He does for us and in us, not by what He bids us do. And he is as little a Christian, as a Jew, who is one "outwardly, in the flesh," in the word or names of things; but he is a Christian who is one "inwardly," by the renewing grace of the Holy Ghost and that penitent trust for mercy to the meritorious passion of the Son of God by which we are made partakers in His resurrection life. Only

when it is thus embraced and allowed full scope, can the Gospel be fairly tested by its results. Then it proves itself to be the "power of God unto salvation," by doing what no law of conduct taken by itself can do. "The ordinances of the Law are fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

CHAPTER V.

JEWISH OBJECTIONS REPELLED.

"What advantage then hath the Jew? or what is the profit of circumcision? Much every way: first of all, that they were intrusted with the oracles of God. For what if some were without faith? shall their want of faith make of none effect the faithfulness of God? God forbid: yea, let God be found true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy words, and mightest prevail when thou comest into judgment. But if our unrighteousness commendeth the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who visiteth with wrath? (I speak after the manner of men.) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world? But if the truth of God through my lie abounded unto his glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? and why not (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say), Let us do evil, that good may come? whose condemnation is just."—ROM. iii. 1-8.

LET us remind ourselves how this passage enters into St. Paul's reasoning. It has been seen in former chapters that he is engaged in paving the way for that method of acquitting and saving sinful men which God has revealed to us by His Gospel. In order to do this, he has undertaken to prove that the world needed a new path to righteousness, that all sorts of men are in point of fact condemned, and that no previous religion had availed to justify or save them. On the contrary, the practical outcome of existing religions had been a condition of excessive demoralisation all over the world; and whatever religious light men possessed had done little else but expose and judge and sentence them for their practical abuses. That this was true of the pagan world he showed

in the latter part of the first chapter. The second chapter has shown it to be no less true of the Hebrew nation. Against the favoured Jew he has made good this terrible indictment, that so far from his possession of God's revealed Law saving him from sin and judgment, that very Law only made his fall the more conspicuous, because it branded with deeper guilt those vices which had made the name of Jew a byword of opprobrium even on Gentile lips. Circumcision—the boasted badge of his nation—was no license to crime, neither could it justify a man whose life was evil. It rather bound him over the more to keep the law of virtue, and condemned him the more when he broke it.

At this point, therefore, St. Paul seems to have established his case. He has "already proved both Jews and Gentiles to be under sin," and he might pass at once, one thinks, to his conclusion at chapter iii. 20: "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in God's sight." But no. Before he can proceed to that conclusion there are two supplementary pieces of work to be done. (1.) His indictment against the Jew as a man still under condemnation for his sin, like any Gentile, lay open to an objection: that objection has to be repelled. (2.) It has also to be shown consistent with their own Hebrew Scriptures: that Scripture proof has to be adduced. These therefore form a couple of supplements or appendices to the argument of the second chapter.

At present we have to deal only with the first of them: The objection repelled.

The objection is this: "If it be true as you say that the outward badge of circumcision and the possession of the Mosaic Law do not really constitute a man a true

Jew, or give him any better standing before God than a Gentile—if, on the contrary, the Jew is to be tried for his faults and condemned for them just as though he were an uncircumcised heathen—then * what advantage has the Jew over a Gentile at all? He has none." Or, to put the question still more sharply: "What is the good of being circumcised? There is no good in it." †

Such an objection as this was likely to arise in the mind of a Hebrew reader of this letter. It implied that St. Paul was proving too much. His argument appeared to place God's favoured people on a level no higher than other men occupied. Such disparagement of the chosen race was not only, in Paul's mouth, unpatriotic and unseemly, but in point of fact untrue. It was impossible to leave an objection like this in his rear, unsilenced. St. Paul replies to it.

Before we proceed, however, to hear his reply, notice for an instant the fallacy which underlies all objections of this sort. It is a fallacy of the human heart. Men are always prone to fancy that any favour which God shows them must render it harder for Him to be quite strict or even impartial when He comes to judge them for their faults. People who are exceptionally favoured involuntarily feel as if their need for implicit obedience to God's law were rather less urgent and His judgments not so very much to be dreaded by them; as if, in fact, God's goodness meant indulgence, and His selection of any one for special privilege meant favouritism. Here was the way in which that fallacy worked in the case of the Jew: "God has selected me and my fathers to be His peculiar, favoured, honoured people upon earth. He has worked wonders for us, spoken to us with His voice,

* In iii. 1, the *οὖν* refers to ii. 28, 29.

† *τί* implies a negative answer.

shone among us by His presence, given us His Law, and fenced us about with a thousand promises of exceptional protection and love. We are His favourites, then, and He never surely can mean to call us to so rigorous a reckoning, or cast us off at last into the very same doom, as await the uncircumcised pagans who know Him not."

One cannot be surprised that the Jew felt so, when one sees how people argue among ourselves. One says: "I don't think God can mean to be hard on me, or let me perish; else why did He spare me to this age, preserve me wonderfully amid dangers, and fill my days with so much kindness?" Another imagines that the elect who have gone through a proper conversion and become regenerate can hardly sin as other men do. Some have even fancied themselves such favourites of heaven that whatever they chose to do in the cause of God was above being censured like the acts of other men by a vulgar standard. There is in truth scarcely any limit to the distorting of the moral judgment, the inflation of religious conceit, the pharisaism and the jesuitry of which men are capable when once you admit this fallacy, that the kindness of God to us gives us any claim upon His indulgence, or implies any willingness on His part to be a "respecter of persons."

The answer of St. Paul to the objection of a Hebrew reader virtually exposes this fallacy. That objection was: "If being a Jew does not shield a man from the penalties of sin, of what advantage is it to him?" Paul answers: Of much advantage, notwithstanding, in every point of view. Certainly it does not shield the Jew from the consequences of sin. But to be shielded from the consequences of one's sin is not the only benefit God can confer on a man. That might even be no benefit at all. Look at the position of a Jew as compared with a Gentile

how you will, and it is one of vast and manifest superiority in respect of privilege, of opportunity, and of blessing from God. Only, when God confers such superiority on one sinful man over another, He is so far from exempting that man from responsibility for his sins, that He immensely increases his responsibility. The favours of God have the opposite effect precisely from that which the human heart fallaciously ascribes to them. Instead of entitling the select or favoured sinner to a less rigorous judgment or a more lenient sentence, they rather impose on him a weightier duty and deepen his condemnation if he prove unfaithful to it.

Look, for example, at the superiority which God was pleased to confer on the Hebrew people. In what did that consist? Let us descend to particulars. It consisted, first of all, in this—that to them God entrusted His supernatural revelation, or holy oracles. While to the rest of mankind He spoke rarely, if at all, save in the indirect, obscure accents of reason and conscience or by the voice of Nature, to this one small select tribe in a corner of Syria God for centuries was sending by inspired prophets the fullest, plainest, most unambiguous and luminous teaching about Himself, His will, His worship, His character, His merciful purposes, His destined redemption and the future of His kingdom. Why did God give all that wealth of revelation to the Hebrews? Because He had a private partiality for them? That they might plume themselves on being favourites and despise others? Or to encourage them to think He cared for no one but themselves, and cared for them so much that they might act as they pleased? Certainly not. Such egotistic, narrow pride in God's revelations as a compliment to their superior merit, or as a private boon to be kept to themselves, was always the weakness of the baser part in Hebrew society.

But larger and nobler Hebrews, like Paul himself, never forgot that the Jew had received the Scriptures, not for himself, but ultimately for the human race; that the divine oracles were not a Jewish possession so much as a trust held by Jewish hands for the world's good; and that the promises given to their fathers were to be fulfilled in One Who should be a "Light to lighten the Gentiles," as well as the "glory of His people Israel."

To be thus the first receivers and the custodians for after time of so precious a deposit as the revealed Word of God, was surely something not to be vain of indeed, yet to profit by; one advantage which the Jew possessed over every Gentile. In any case it was a huge advantage. For even suppose (Paul goes on to argue) that Israel, or a good part of it, failed to profit by this possession of God's Word, did not understand it or believe it or use it aright, was in fact not at all the better for having it, did that make it no privilege to have received it? Was it no kindness to have got it straight from heaven? Or were the oracles themselves false and worthless simply because the men who held them in trust for the rest of the world chose to make a bad use of them? Certainly not. God's oracles are true, whether you believe them or not. He is faithful if you are not.* Your incredulity cannot undo the credibility of a divine message, or hinder it from being fulfilled, or make it a word of no value which it was of no consequence for you to hear. Nay. The privilege of receiving divine truth through divine oracles is a real privilege and a great privilege, and one to be accounted for, whether you use that truth well or use it ill. There was some profit in being outwardly a Jew, then, although, so far from relieving a man from blame if he rejected Jehovah's word, it rather added to his guilt. There is

* Cf. *ἀπιστία* and *τὴν πίστιν* in ver. 3.

some profit now in being taught as a Christian, even though, if we do not live as Christians, our doom shall be the worse for it.

It was unhappily too true that (as Paul puts it with designed mildness) "some"—the great bulk indeed—of the Jewish people did reject the central hope promised to their race, and, when Messiah came, refused and slew Him through unbelief. Round about this promise of the Christ circled the whole body of sacred oracles committed to the Hebrews; yet this promised Christ they would not have. But the unbelief of the chosen people did not hinder the Almighty from fulfilling His word. What it really did, was to rob them of those saving blessings of which they had the first offer, and which they might have been the first to secure. God's truth was not falsified because they were found false to their national faith and hope. On the contrary, the very faithlessness of Israel to their side in that national covenant with God only threw into brighter relief the divine faithfulness, when, turning from His faithless elect, He called in the heathen in their stead and made His Son the Head of a wider kingdom—the Head and the King of Christendom. To say that God will be true to His own word though every man prove a liar, is to understate the case. Rather man's falsehood serves to manifest more clearly the truth of God's word and the justice of His judgments; so that, as David sang in the fifty-first Psalm:—

> "Thou mightest be justified in Thy words,
> And mightest prevail when Thou comest into judgment."

When the Apostle began at the second verse to particularise the points of Hebrew pre-eminence over Gentiles, one naturally expected that after the first point—the possession of Holy Scripture—others would follow. He seems,

in fact, to have intended this himself. What these other advantages of the Hebrew race were, we know from a later passage of this letter, where he does enumerate them.* They were such as these: (*a*) God had adopted the nation into a filial relation to Himself, for thus had Jehovah said: "Israel is My son, My firstborn." (*b*) God had dwelt among them in the visible "glory" of His Shekinah. (*c*) God had concluded covenants of friendship both with their fathers and with the nation itself. (*d*) He had given them His Law and (*e*) arranged the whole ritual of their worship. (*f*) Theirs, too, were the evangelical promises of the Messiah; (*g*) theirs the memories of the patriarchs; theirs, above all, (*h*) the supreme honour of giving birth to the human nature of Him Who on His Divine side is "over all, God blessed for ever." Some such enumeration as this may have been in Paul's mind when he began with their possession of the oracles of God. But his discussion of that first point has led him somewhat aside. A new difficulty—a fresh objection which may be urged against his doctrine of sin and condemnation—has here crossed his path; and he turns aside to meet it also. Let us see what it is.

That quotation which he has just cited from king David's great Psalm of penitence cuts to the very roots of the relation betwixt man's sins and God's judgment. It is the deep breathing of a sinner who in his profound consciousness of guilt has caught sight of the awful truth that God uses the very sin of His creatures to make more transparent to all created eyes the uprightness of His sentence when He dooms them. God is equally just and true in His sentence against every transgressor, the most occult or unacknowledged as well as the most flagrant and confessed. But the truth or justice of His

* See chapter ix. 4, 5.

sentence is then disclosed so that it can neither be impeached nor questioned, when, under signal circumstances, a sinner is permitted to sin with a high hand and in open rebellion against the light. Germs of lust and falsehood and hate lay in the heart of the Hebrew king—visible enough to God—before opportunity betrayed the man into such crimes as adultery, treachery, and murder. But God, who is never the Author of evil, is always its Lord or Overruler. When David lay in the dust bemoaning his detected vileness in the pure eyes of Jehovah, he saw that one result of his having fallen into such scandalous crime was this—that God's character as a Judge would be cleared from all suspicion of severity or unfairness. The sentence of God against him would appear to be a sentence completely justified by the facts. He had even grace enough to be glad of that.

The same principle, it is plain, admitted of an easy application to the whole Hebrew people. Their special privilege in possessing the written Law and the divine oracles, had worked no other effect than to leave them more inexcusable than the heathen. They knew better; they had stronger ties to God; their very profession condemned their practice. Might it not be said of them, that their open unfaithfulness to the oracles of God, so far from being covered by their higher privileges, served to make more clear the justice of God's sentence—to vindicate Him, as it were, in His judgments upon them?*

It is obvious, however, that this profound principle in the moral administration of the Almighty lies open to a perilous abuse. A false inference may be drawn from it. It is true, that inference is so blasphemous that one needs to apologise for even naming it. It lies utterly outside

* The emphatic "our" of verse 5, is probably to be read as equivalent to—*of us Jews.*

the sphere of Christian thought. It is impossible on Christian lips. But it is, alas! only too possible to the natural heart of man. Sinful men, in their eagerness to exculpate themselves, are given to think and say such a horrid thing as this:—That if a sinner's sin cause God's justice and truth to shine forth more clearly, God has no right to punish the man for that very action by which God Himself (so to speak) has profited. If the Eternal reap good out of my evil, then I deserve no longer blame, at His hands at all events; but rather thanks. This is the perverted logic of evil which is expressed twice over in these words of our text:—"If our unrighteousness commend (or, set forth in greater clearness) God's righteousness, what shall we say? That God in inflicting vengeance upon us does an unjust thing?" For example: "If through a lie of mine, the truth of God is made to appear more admirable, to His greater glory, why am I to be still judged as a sinner for it?"

Every pious heart must sympathise with the indignant rejection by the Apostle of so hateful an inference as this. But the arguments by which he rebuts it are very instructive. They are two: neither of them speculative, or professing to explain the deep mysteries of this tremendous subject, I mean of the relation of God to that sin which He permits and punishes; but both of them simply exposing the practical results which would follow from such a position. It would prove fatal, he argues, both to religion and to morality.

In the first place, if God could not justly punish any sin which He is able to overrule for good, then there could be no judgment of the world at all. Obviously, it would always be open to a transgressor to plead in bar of judgment that God's justice was to be somehow made more conspicuous by that very sin; and if this made it

unjust in God to punish, how is God to judge the world? Now the final judgment of God is of all religious truths the most fundamental and the most certain. Any doctrine accordingly which should thus paralyze the hand of the final Judge of men or drive Him from His judgment-seat, is by that very fact shown to be absurd and incredible.

Secondly, this blasphemous inference is as fatal to morals as it is to faith. It cuts through the distinction betwixt good and evil. If an act is no longer to be called bad, or to be punished, out of which some good comes, then you may do any evil you like for the sake of a good result. Of course this is on the face of it to confound moral right and wrong, and by withdrawing all practical restraint on immorality to open a perfect flood-gate of evil. Any doctrine which sanctions such a conclusion is by that very fact, not absurd only, but atrocious.

Yet this immoral maxim had actually been imputed to St. Paul by certain of his contemporaries. As he comes in sight of it, he cannot restrain his impatient indignation at such a calumny, but breaks through the construction of his sentence to tell us that some actually charged him with teaching and (what was even worse) with practising the vile principle: "Let us do evil that good may come!" Who they were that said so, or what pretext for saying it they found in his teaching, we can only guess. But there is no question that the evangelical doctrine of a sinner's gratuitous justification on the ground of Christ's righteousness (which St. Paul is here preparing to prove) has often been assailed on this very charge, that it not only confers immunity upon sinners, but actually holds out to a man an inducement to continue in sin that thereby grace may abound at last to the greater glory of God. Such a charge rests indeed upon a misconception of the Gospel, as appears further on in this Epistle (ch. vi. 1 ff). It is flatly oppug-

nant to that consuming zeal for righteousness which blazes through every portion of this Epistle, and especially through the section we have been examining. Whatever Paul taught, every reader feels that he was not a man to teach anything to weaken in the slightest the paramount claims of virtue, or the guilt and hatefulness of sin, or the majesty of God's judgment, or the wholesome dread of men for a reckoning to come. On the contrary, his whole argument rests on a basis of natural justice. It assumes that God's final judgment according to human actions is the surest of all things; that it must be impartial; that no religious privilege can lessen responsibility, but must increase it; that you cannot sophisticate sin into anything else than sin; and that God is always just in punishing every soul of man that doeth evil. You feel, therefore, that Paul is speaking out of the very heart of his faith, as well as out of the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, when he flings back with all his strength this hateful calumny, protests against the Gospel (any more than the Hebrew Law) being made a minister to sin, and declares that every man who ventures to do evil that good may come shall meet with a condemnation which shall be just.

On the whole, then, the lesson of this section is to warn us against the insidious temptation, so near to the human heart, to break down the edge of God's justice against sin, in the hope that somehow He will prove as placable in the last judgment as He is kind and patient now, or to fancy that because He makes His own use of sin, He will not avenge it on the sinner very strictly—especially in the case of people who belong to the true religion. All this is most perilous. We who live in Christendom are the privileged class nowadays, as Jews were once. Our superiority over the heathen is enormous "in every way:" but it confers on us no immunity to sin. It makes our

evil deeds not less evil, but more so, that we do them under cover of the Christian name. In our own righteousness, therefore, we dare as little meet God at last with any hope to escape His wrath as an unbaptized infidel dare. Practically, we are shut up under sin —guilty before God, with no apology to plead in bar of judgment. Hope—if we have any hope—lies neither in our knowledge of the Bible, nor in our membership in the Church, nor in any fact about ourselves at all, but only in the grace of God through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Gratuitous justification through the righteousness of our Surety—to that we are shut up by the Apostle's logic. May God shut us all up to it by what is better than logic, the constraint of His convicting and regenerating Spirit!

CHAPTER VI.

EVERY MOUTH STOPPED.

"What then? are we in worse case than they? No, in no wise; for we before laid to the charge both of Jews and Greeks, that they are all under sin; as it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, There is none that seeketh after God; they have all turned aside, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not so much as one: their throat is an open sepulchre: with their tongues they have used deceit: the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it speaketh to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God; because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for through the law cometh the knowledge of sin."—ROM. iii. 9–20.

ST. PAUL has just repelled a very natural objection on the part of the Jew to that sweeping indictment which classed Jews and Gentiles in one category as alike guilty before God. The objection, it will be remembered, was this: that to class together in this way the Jew with the Gentile was virtually to allow God's favoured people no privilege or pre-eminence at all. He has replied to that (iii. 1–8). He has conceded to the Hebrew people a great advantage in respect especially of religious knowledge. But such a superiority, he has argued, cannot shield the Hebrew transgressor from God's just sentence on his evil deeds. He is now, therefore, in a position to take up and re-affirm his original conclusion as one which has been established beyond controversy (ver. 9). "What then? Are we

Jews in a better case than they who are Gentiles? * That is: have we any such privilege or preference over them as secures us against the divine judgment? Not in the very least. On the contrary, I have already (in chapters i. and ii.) arraigned both Jews and Gentiles as alike under the guilt and power of sin."

To St. Paul himself, this had been the great discovery of his life. It had wrought a revolution in his own history when he came to see, on that memorable expedition to Damascus, that for a Jew to try to justify himself in Heaven's sight or win Heaven's favour through his punctilious observance of the Old Testament Law, was an utter delusion. He had always been brought up to expect salvation along that line. He knew how deep the same mistake lay rooted in the heart of his best countrymen. Now, therefore, since he has set himself in this letter to overthrow it, if he can, he must leave no argument unused which can assist to dislodge it. One argument always very much in place with a Jew was the authority of Sacred Scripture. Every Jew would admit that an appeal "to

* The very hurried way in which Paul makes his transition of thought at this point, to take up afresh his main argument after the parenthetic interruption, iii. 5–8, has created a puzzle for the interpreter. The difficulty is to make a good sense out of προεχόμεθα, either as a Passive (="*Are we surpassed?*" which is the sense preferred by the Revisers and put by them into the text) or as a Middle (="*Have we an excuse?*" or "*Do we make excuse?*" which is the sense margined by them). The latter seems to me to yield a better sense than the former; but I cannot satisfy myself that either suits the course of the Apostle's reasoning in the context. It is exegetically a *last resort* to take it (as the *Authorised Version* did, with many older and recent commentators) for a Middle used in the Active sense of "*Do we surpass?*" No example of this is found in the case of this particular verb. But it does occur in later Greek with other verbs; and the assumption that it occurs here also, supported as it is by Greek Fathers, appears to me to offer the only outlet from the difficulty. I abide therefore in this instance by the Authorised Version and understand: Have we (Jews) any advantage or preference (over Gentiles) such as can serve our turn?

the Law and to the Testimony" was a perfectly valid appeal. Everywhere in the New Testament we find that its teachers, from our adorable Lord Himself downwards, attach their lessons to the Old Testament, buttress their doctrine by its authority, and treat it as an unimpeachable oracle of revelation. Such a reference to the elder volume of Scripture could nowhere carry greater weight or appositeness than here, where the design is to convict the Jew of being a sinner out of that very Law which he boasted to be the instrument of his justification. Did God then in His Word treat His Hebrew people as righteous? Was the moral condition of Israel as pictured in the divine record a condition of approved virtue? Had the Law in point of fact availed to save the nation from immorality? Let the sacred books answer.

The Apostle's Scripture proof deserves a moment's examination. From the current Greek translation of the Old Testament, he cites with more or less exactness six different passages. But the force of the quotation is not alike in them all. What he starts with is a very sweeping and categorical denial that such a thing as a righteous man was to be found on earth at all. In the fourteenth Psalm, Jehovah is pictured as looking down from His celestial habitation to see if among the human family there could be discovered so much as one who had set his heart to seek God and was in every point blameless.* It is the result of this divine inspection which is gathered up in the strong words cited by St. Paul:—

> "There is none righteous: no, not one;
> There is none that understandeth,

* This Psalm has possibly a greater emphasis impressed upon it from the circumstance that a slightly altered edition of it recurs further on in the Second Book of the collection, where it is numbered the fifty-third.

There is none that seeketh after God;
They have all turned aside;
They are together become unprofitable;
There is none that doeth good, no, not so much as one."
(R. V.)

Of course, the value of the passage for St. Paul's purpose lies in its wholesale character: in its condemnation of every man without exception. No unusual degree of wickedness is ascribed to any one; but such a deviation from godly paths and right conduct as suffices at least to condemn us is detected in every case by the awful eye of Him who is now our Witness and is by-and-by to be our Judge.

It is otherwise with the next class of quotations.* If Israel failed to exhibit even one single man who so kept God's law as to be without censure, on the other hand it did show at various times a state of private and public corruption perfectly appalling. Of this two instances are alleged. First, from those numerous Psalms which are believed with more or less confidence to describe the darker aspects of society in the reign of King David, Paul draws a picture which is very ugly. The expressions come from three different Psalms: the fifth, the hundred and fortieth and the tenth; but if they are Davidic they refer in substance to the same people, namely, the godless faction who for various reasons secretly resented the rule of David and plotted against it:—

"Their throat is an open sepulchre; (Psalm v. 9)
With their tongues they have used deceit:

* It is curious that the whole *cento* of texts brought together by St. Paul is found in the current text of the Septuagint at Psalm xiv. (not Psalm liii.). Thence it passed into the Vulgate and the "Prayer Book Version" of the Psalms. I assume that it was from our Epistle this addition first found its way into the few MSS. of the LXX. where it occurs; though this can scarcely be said to be certain.

The poison of asps is under their lips : (Psalm cxl. 3).
Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (Psalm x. 7).

This is a sketch of a set of defeated men, held in check from open violence, but venting their spite against God's Anointed by secret lies, imprecations and calumnies; by word-sins, that is, of the meanest and most detestable character. Yet that was Israel during its most heroic age. In part, at least, that was Israel under the most religious of all its kings.

Turn next to a later page in Jewish story—to the great Prophet period adorned by the elcquence of Isaiah. From a very dark description of the moral condition of Judea in the fifty-ninth chapter of that prophet, Paul extracts these few lines:—

"Their feet are swift to shed blood :
Destruction and misery are in their ways :
And the way of peace have they not known" (Isaiah lix. 7, 8).

A few sentences before, Isaiah had been denouncing his contemporaries for speaking lies and hatching mischief like the rebels of King David's reign; but the special feature of Hebrew society in the prophet's age was not its falsehood but its violence. The law was feeble and the bonds of society so relaxed that men openly rushed to bloodshed like one who makes his feet swift for a race. The path of powerful criminals was strewn with rapine, carnage and grief, with the curses and groans of the common people who were victims to the great man's cruelty or greed. Those who are acquainted with the later Prophets will be able to recall plenty of passages to confirm this sad account. So little could Mosaic Law "save" the people of Israel, or stanch at its source the spring of iniquity, that time after time the depravity of man ripened into states of social demoralisation which

rivalled the laxity of heathen manners. Nor is it any wonder that the Law of God proved too weak to check the overflow of wicked passion, since it had no power to plant in the heart that reverential fear of God which is "the beginning of wisdom" and the basis of religion. So St. Paul winds up his series of Scripture texts by one brief word which cuts to the root of the whole matter. The Law could neither produce a solitary righteous man, nor hinder such a social state as David and Isaiah depict; for it could not change the deep underlying alienation of the natural heart from God. Of the Hebrews, the infallible Word had to testify as of other men:

"There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Psalm xxxvi. 2).

It is impossible to break the edge of such Scripture evidence by alleging that it refers to some one else than Jews. What the Law says, it addresses to those who are under it (v. 19). The Old Testament is spoken to the Old Testament people. It is their sinful state which is described in such strong and sweeping language. But the evidence carries an *a fortiori* application to the pagan world. If these were the fruits found on the green and favoured plant of Israel, God's vine, what could be expected from the dry stock of any Gentile race, like Assyria or Egypt, out in the uncultured wilderness of heathendom? By such appalling practical proofs as have now been cited, the Jew's mouth is shut: he stands speechless, because defenceless, before the tribunal of the righteous Judge. Much more is the Gentile dumb. The demonstration is complete. Every mouth is stopped. The whole world is not arraigned only, but convicted. All men are guilty before God.

Perhaps some readers are aware of a feeling like dis-

appointment at reaching this result. Not that they doubt the native depravity of mankind, or the certainty that all men, left to themselves, will go very far astray from righteousness. But it may be said, All men were not left to themselves. God interposed with a holy and awful Law. He took one race under His own moral education. He taught them carefully the way of duty, and did what was possible to fence them in it and cut off all temptation to wander out of it. Surely the average moral standard was greatly raised within that sheltered Hebrew commonwealth; and many individual Hebrews succeeded in leading very virtuous and devout lives, "in all the ordinances of the Law blameless." Does it not sound a little hard to say that not one of them was good enough to justify his life in the sight of God? Is this not like confessing that the whole Mosaic system of religious training and moral legislation was a failure?—that it missed its aim and broke down at the very point where it was of most consequence to succeed?

This opens up a number of grave questions with which St. Paul will have to deal further on in his letter. How far Israel failed to realise its calling, and why it did so, and what section of it did not fail, are points to be discussed in later chapters. But to put us in a right attitude for judging in this whole matter, it is of the first consequence to see what the purpose of God was in giving His Law at all. You cannot judge whether the Mosaic legislation was a failure or not, until you know what it was intended to accomplish. Now, the express teaching of St. Paul is that God did not expect the Jews to attain such a righteousness as would justify them at the last, by their own attempts to keep that Mosaic Law. If its intention had been that a conscientious Jew,

striving to observe all that the Law told him to do, should thereby become by the sheer force of his own virtue free from blame so as to win acceptance with the Eternal Judge, then, certainly, it would have missed its aim; since, as St. Paul has shown, no Jew ever won divine acceptance in that way.

To take the Mosaic Law in this fashion for a path of salvation, a rule which a man might keep closely enough to merit thereby eternal life—had been the early blunder of Paul's own upbringing. That was what he himself once thought. That had made him as a youth "exceedingly zealous for the traditions of his fathers, touching the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless."* But (as I said) the great discovery which revolutionised his life was this, that God never meant him to be justified by keeping the Mosaic or any other law—not by trying to keep laws of conduct at all, but in quite another way. "By the works of the Law"—works which a man does in order to keep a prescribed rule of duty—"shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God" (v. 20). If it be asked, why? the reason is given us in another passage of St. Paul's writings, where he says: "If there had been a law given which could make alive, then indeed righteousness would have been by the Law" (Gal. iii. 21). What sinful men want is life, the will and the power to do what is right: for, as we find ourselves, we are dead to God and to His service. We may know what is good, we may approve it, we may even wish to do it. Yet when the stress of temptation comes, desire proves too strong for virtue. We are swept away by our baser passions, and carried captive, like one beaten in battle, by the conquering strength of sin. The Law is not able to help us here. Moses' Law does not; no law can. For,

* See Gal. i. 14 and Phil. iii. 5, 6.

as Paul says, a law is not intended to give life: it is only intended to regulate life.

I presume that canon of St. Paul's will be found to hold even of physical life on the surface of our globe. Men of science are at this moment doing their best, by applying the ascertained laws of chemistry and biology, to produce life. They would, if they could, find a physical law which should give physical life. How if it should turn out, in physics, that material laws are given to regulate life where the great Life-Giver has first created it; but that no law of material forces can possibly originate life out of death? In the moral sphere it certainly is so. You tell a man he ought to love God with his whole heart. That is a law, and a great one. But suppose the man's whole heart is filled with dislike of God and suspicion of Him and dread of Him, will it mend things to tell him he ought to love? The love of the man's heart is dead, and law cannot make it alive. Or you legislate—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." It is good, it is beautiful. But I do not love my neighbour. I am a narrow-hearted, shallow creature, who wants to get the best of everything for myself, and I cannot let go my private good for the benefit of any neighbour. Of what use is your beautiful law to me? It condemns me. Yes; and in condemning, it exasperates me. But it cannot change my selfishness into noble-hearted generosity. It has no power to give me the life of kindness. Here lies the essential infirmity of a law. It takes for granted that there is moral and religious life in the person addressed —a will and a power to do what is bidden. If there is, all is well. The law is very useful. It informs the willing spirit how the Lord would have it act, and it serves as a bank on either hand to guide the stream of generous impulse into serviceable channels. But when

there is no impulse to good, no will to do right, what can the law do? "It is weak through the flesh" (Rom. viii. 3).

Something surely it must be able to do. Else why was it given to sinful men at all? St. Paul has pointed out our mistake: the Law was not meant to lead to righteousness, because it could not give spiritual life. St. Paul goes on to correct it: the Law was meant to fill a far humbler office—it brought us a better knowledge of our sin!

"Better knowledge of sin"? Yes, that at least we get through knowing God's Law. When we are told what we ought to do, we learn that we are not doing what we ought. The faintest spark of natural conscience in a savage bosom serves this end at least, that the barbarian's grosser acts of treachery or cruelty seem evil even to himself. The educated conscience of an old Greek or Roman imposed upon him a severer standard and made him ashamed of less flagrant crimes. Moses' nobler code, given by Jehovah Himself, trained the Hebrew people by degrees to regard as sinful practices which neighbouring nations called innocent, and exalted every instinctive vice of the blood into the express transgression of a recorded statute. The Christian morality which we have learnt from the New Testament has made the modern conscience quicker than ever to detect, and louder than ever in condemning, what is false, dishonourable, impure, ungenerous. Thus each addition to revealed Law widens men's knowledge of what is sinful, and pushes forward the frontier of the forbidden a little nearer to that ideal line which God's own nature prescribes. "Through the Law cometh the knowledge of sin."

Again: when a law has succeeded in educating one's conscience to recognise that what is forbidden is in itself

evil or that what is commanded is right, there follows a certain desire to keep that law—an effort even after keeping it. We cannot approve what is good and not wish to pursue it. The moral pressure thus put upon a man's natural likings serves, in many an instance, to reveal to himself his moral impotence. The good he fain would do in his better moods he fails to do in the moment of temptation; and when the recoil comes, and desire has burnt itself down to white, cold ash, and the Law awakes afresh within the conscience to judge the man for that weak and wicked yielding to improper desire, then comes a new and very bitter "knowledge of sin." It is the knowledge of sin as a strong thing, stronger than I am—a hateful hostile power or alien despot, which has entrenched itself within my nature and lords it there over everything that is wholesome in me. This knowledge of sin also comes by the Law.

Suppose further that a man is become so far a creature of the Law that through long education he has been trained to walk contentedly within its close fences—has got used to curb his temper and choke down his passions, and never to explode with inward fume, but always wear a smooth, decorous face; suppose he is thus all that the Law can make him, irreproachable in the presence of society, fair-spoken, scrupulous, proper, respectable—"touching the righteousness which is in the Law, blameless"—why, then he is only on the road to a still more profound "knowledge of sin." Such a man may discover, and if he is very honest and thorough he will admit to himself, that deep down beneath this blameless exterior, the old passions are not quenched, nor the old self-will slain. He will admit that in doing violence to his tastes, he has not really changed them. Although he puts a prudent restraint upon himself, he is the very same man

as ever. He has merely drilled himself into outward propriety, but at the root remains ungodly. Is it unfair to say that such righteousness is little better than a mask, useful in society, but sure to be detected by the judgment of Heaven?—that the soul of such a man resembles a volcano over which the lava has in the meantime cooled? What terrific knowledge of sin is here! What a discovery of the incurableness of the heart's evil! What a revelation of the impotence of law and the unattainableness of genuine righteousness under any system of legal repression! Surely by the Law, do as you will, there is no path to a satisfying righteousness in the sight of God, but only to a deeper and ever deeper knowledge of human sin!

CHAPTER VII.

PAUL'S EVANGEL.

"But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, by his blood, to shew his righteousness, because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; for the shewing, I say, of his righteousness at this present season: that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus."—ROM. iii. 21-26.

THE reasoning of the Apostle down to this point has been preparative, or, as I may say, destructive. Its object has been to clear the ground for the doctrine which formed his message to mankind. Before we hear him expound his own novel and positive teaching, let us recall to mind what the precise ground is that he has cleared. It is hardly a sufficient statement of his scope to say that he has proved all men to be sinners. I should rather say that this did not need to be proved. What he has really been labouring to show ever since his argument began at i. 18, is this: that nothing hitherto known or revealed from heaven in the way of religious truth had possessed any power to deliver sinful men from their sins —neither the truths of natural law in the conscience of heathens nor the truths of Mosaic Law in the Scriptures of the Jew; but that, on the contrary, every particle of

religious light had only brought into more vivid relief the hopeless sinfulness of men and their inexcusable guilt. This, I repeat, though very needful to be shown, is only negative or destructive teaching, preparing us to receive what new and positive truth the Gospel may bring. Its effect is to shut every soul of man up in one common prison-house of hopeless condemnation—guilty, and not able to see any ray of hope that he shall ever be acquitted from his guilt (iii. 19, 20).

"But now," says St. Paul;—at this point in the argument, or perhaps,* at this point in the development of human history, when, heathenism and Judaism having both alike run their course to its end and proved their practical helplessness to deliver man, the whole world lay convicted by the terrible logic of facts as a world that could not justify itself: "*now*" at last there enters into history God's own method for justifying† sinful men, "apart from His Law." What that method of justification is, we shall be presently told. Only notice beforehand in what sense it can be called new. Not that it had never been heard of before, or as if no inkling of it whatever had reached man's ears during the long past. No; for, says Paul, "it was borne witness to by the Law and the Prophets." That is, the whole Old Testament Scripture—especially the typical institutions of the Mosaic sacrificial

* *νυνὶ* in verse 21 may be either logical or temporal. The general reference throughout this discussion to the past experience of mankind and to the new "revelation" of the Gospel, inclines me rather to prefer the latter.

† The *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* of verse 21 looks back to and is identical with the *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* of i. 17, and must be taken in the same sense. What that sense here is appears from verse 24, which, as I have already shown at page 15, is virtually Paul's own definition of the phrase. It is God's way of justifying men gratuitously by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. In i. 17 that was said to be "revealed" in the Gospel. Here it is said to be "now made plain."

and ceremonial system and the messages of the theocratic prophets who, age after age, sustained Israel's hope in a coming Deliverer—had testified to it beforehand. Their written testimony remains unto this day.* God's Gospel method of justification stands "apart" indeed from the Mosaic Law of works, but it is by no means unknown to Hebrew revelation. Before the Gospel was disclosed there was a hidden Gospel even under the Old Covenant. The new thing is that *now* what was obscurely borne witness to has been made open and clear.† God's secret stands discovered. Only not, in the first instance, through a verbal message or doctrine preached up and down the Roman Empire by St. Paul and other Christian missionaries. For the revelation of God's mind by a spoken word is not the earliest thing. His earliest discovery of His meaning is by deed and fact. What Paul had to preach was there in awful acts of God's own doing, before either Paul or another opened his lips to preach at all. The fact of the incarnation of the Son by superhuman birth, the fact of His identification with fallen men as their Head, the fact of His separation and devotement by the Father to be our propitiatory Victim, the fact of His self-oblation to sacrificial death, the fact of God's recognition of His atonement as adequate by His resurrection to life, the fact of His elevation to the throne for the completion of His work as man's Redeemer: these immense facts or deeds, done by the Eternal God Himself, constitute the Gospel.‡ They manifest, even without words, and far more plainly than words could do, how God is just when

* This point is to receive full proof and illustration from the Apostle further on.

† "Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet; Vetus in Novo patet." —Augustine.

‡ Hence our four historical records of them are, with perfect accuracy styled "the Gospels."

He justifies the sinner who trusts in Christ. If no tongue of Evangelist or Apostle had ever spoken, these facts would have stood just the same as they stand now, and the way of our justification would have been in point of fact as secure and open as it is to-day. So that St. Paul could say with absolute correctness (verse 25): "God Himself did set Christ Jesus publicly forth to view as a propitiation by His blood."

I think if we fasten attention upon this revelation of the Gospel by God Himself in divine facts as the first thing and the chief thing, which Apostles and other preachers had only to declare abroad by their words in order that men might know what God had done and believe it, we shall get to understand why St. Paul in these very weighty verses enters so little into any explanation of what I may call the theology of salvation or its theory. There is here no discussion of either the doctrine of atonement or the doctrine of justification, from an abstract point of view. His exposition, on the contrary, is all intensely concrete. It deals with actual facts. It simply states how the crucifixion of Jesus has permanently modified the previous attitude of God toward sinful men. In Paul's view the appearance and death of Jesus Christ is the central fact of history. It serves to explain what was ambiguous or open to misapprehension in God's treatment of men before it happened. It has put God in a position to treat men otherwise now. All this is not theory but fact.

Let us inquire a little more closely into his meaning.

The history of God's relations with human sin breaks into two: before Christ and after Christ. The death of Christ, which marks the point of division, is at the same time the key to explain both.

I. Antecedently to the death of Christ, the sins of men

were passed over in the forbearance of God (ver. 25). That is to say, before Christ came and died, God, in point of fact, suffered the sins of men to go by unavenged. His retributive justice appeared to sleep. He "winked at the times of ignorance," and overlooked offences for which no sufficient atonement had been offered, nor any sufficient penalty endured. So far was this strange toleration carried, that the very justice of the Divine Judge came in some danger to be called in question. It was far from apparent that God meant to exact any strict satisfaction for breaches of His law. It is not true indeed, that no signs of divine wrath at sin were to be seen, or that no punishment ever overtook a criminal. Yet the execution in this life of retribution upon wrong-doing has always been so uncertain in its occurrence, and at its worst has fallen so far beneath sin's desert, that, were there nothing to be feared in a hereafter nor any judgment to come, men really could not affirm that the world was ruled on principles of perfect righteousness. In the providence of the world, vengeance limps but tardily in the footsteps of crime; while, not to speak of the impenitent who go unpunished, what shall we say of pre-Christian penitents who asked pardon for their sins, yet found no expiation for them? The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. Even under Mosaic ritual every year saw a fresh remembrance made of sins, which, often confessed, were never actually purged away. The divine policy (so to say) was to let sin pass, neither avenged nor atoned for, leaving still an open reckoning—a reckoning which grew year after year and age after age the longer and more heavy, till men might have been excused if they began to doubt whether vengeance upon evil works was ever to be executed at all.*

At last, in the end of the ages, a day came when God

* See Eccl. viii. 11; and cf. passages like Ps. xciv., or lxxiii. or lviii.

Himself did a thing which has for ever cleared His clouded administration and vindicated His judicial righteousness. At last, He held forth to public gaze (*προέθετο*, ver. 25), an expiation of sin by blood which did satisfy justice and demonstrate in a way too terrible to be mistaken the severe impartial rectitude of the divine judgments. The death of Jesus Christ by sacrificial blood-shedding, as a Victim offered in expiation of guilt, is "set forth" as a public act done by Almighty God Himself for the illustration of His own justice (*εἰς ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ*).

The word "propitiation" (or propitiatory, *ἱλαστήριον*) which Paul employs to describe Christ Jesus as "set forth for the illustration of justice," may either mean a victim offered in sacrifice for the recovery of divine favour, or it may refer to that golden lid of the ark in the Jewish Holy of Holies, where God sat enthroned and propitious because on it was yearly sprinkled the blood of an atoning sacrifice. Under either rendering, the substantial sense remains identically the same. The death of Christ is in either case the one sacrifice through which the sins of the world have been expiated and God has been enabled to extend favour to His guilty creatures. This solemn and unparalleled act of expiation, where it is not any meaner blood than that of the Eternal Son—come in flesh for that very end—which flows for the sins of the people, is at the same time the most impressive exhibition of the divine vengeance against sin. Rather than that sins, passed over so long in the exercise of forbearance, should go altogether unavenged, God offered His Son for their expiation. By no other act could He so loudly declare His inextinguishable hatred of sin or the inflexible justice of His sentence upon it. By this one act, He has cut off from men the temptation to misconstrue His earlier toleration of sins, His forbearance to punish them, or His willingness to

forgive them. Then, in the antecedent ages, He did pretermit sin in His forbearance; but it was only because He had purposed in His heart one day to offer for it a satisfaction such as this. He never meant to make light of it, to wink at it for ever, or to pardon it without adequate satisfaction. So far from that—this was what He meant. To this sacrifice He looked forward all along. For this He could hold His peace through long centuries under the injurious suspicion that He was a God who sat loose to law and justice; because He knew that one day the awful cross of His own Son would silence every cavil and give to the universe emphatic demonstration that He is a just God, who will by no means clear the guilty.

II. Next, from looking at the bearing of Christ's death upon the time past, let us look at its bearing on "this present season." The same public satisfaction for sin, made by God in the face of the world, which is adequate to explain His former indulgence to past sin, is adequate to justify Him in forgiving sin now (verse 26). Before Christ came, God's attitude to sin was simply provisional. It was an attitude of forbearance; it was pretermission. More than that it could not be, because no proper satisfaction for sin had as yet been offered. So much even as that it could not have been, unless a proper satisfaction had been about to be offered. But now, since Christ has actually died, God does not deal with sinners only after a provisional or temporary fashion. He has no need to "wink at" sin as He used to do, and pass it by. He no longer holds out to penitents as He used to do a hope that it will one day become possible for Him to blot their sins finally and for ever out of sight and memory. For He is now as able to deal finally and effectually with sin as He will ever be. Justice has received all the satisfaction it needs or can ask for. Full due has been

rendered to the broken law. No shade of suspicion, whether of feebleness or of injustice, can rest upon the divine character, supposing God should at once and absolutely acquit any guilty man for whose guilt Christ has made complete atonement. Now, therefore, God is in a position, not to pretermit sins only, but to remit them; not to suspend the sentence, but to abrogate it; not to promise forgiveness merely, but to confer it. His justice is as much vindicated from the charge of making light of sin when He acquits the penitent believer to-day from all condemnation, as when long ago He passed over "the transgressions that were under the first covenant." For there stands in the centre of history that cross which has for ever magnified the Law and illustrated the justice of God alike in His ancient forbearance and in His Gospel grace.

This new attitude into which God the Judge has been placed by the historical fact of Christ's death is of so much moment—is, in fact, so essentially the Pauline Gospel—that it is worth while to trace it out in a little ampler detail. Still following closely St. Paul's guidance in the text, I distinguish these following points:—

In the first place, the propitiation instituted by God in His Son's sacrificial death having been amply adequate to vindicate divine justice, without any further exaction of penalty from sinners, Christ's death becomes obviously our redemption. That is to say, it serves the purpose of a price paid for our ransom, or an offering in consideration of which we who were held in custody as sentenced prisoners of justice may now go free. The Son of Man has given His life (in His own words) as a ransom price in the stead of many; and that atoning ransom being adequate, we have "redemption through His blood—even the forgiveness of sins."* So that it is so far from being unjust in

* Cf. Matt. xx. 28 with 1 Tim. ii. 6; and Eph. i. 7 with Col. i. 14.

God to acquit or declare free from charge and doom of sin, those for whom Christ's death is pleaded, that it would be plainly unjust to do anything else. The Deliverer has paid the price of blood for forfeited lives of guilty men;* and justice herself will now fling wide open her prison-gates, tear across her handwriting of condemnation, and proclaim the ransomed to be justified from sin. This St. Paul terms "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

In the second place, let God justify whom He will on the ground of this redemption by the expiating blood of His Son, such a justifying of the guilty must be entirely a gratuitous act on His part; undeserved, unbought by themselves; a boon of pure and sovereign grace (cf. δωρεὰν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι, ver. 24). It must be so, because it is obviously independent of any action of men's own, and depends solely upon God's action on their behalf in the passion of His Son. It turns upon that solitary and transcendent deed of the Eternal Judge, which He did when once, in the midst of the human ages, He condemned sin in the flesh of Christ, and set forth Christ Jesus as a propitiation in His own blood. That act was a concession to justice. It manifested the judicial impartiality and uprightness of the Lawgiver. But it was done at the bidding of love for the condemned, and its issue is grace —free, gratuitous, unstinted grace to the undeserving. God must be just; more, He must be shown to be just: but He chose this way of manifesting His justice, that through it He might also manifest mercy; and mercy rejoiceth over judgment.

In the third place, a way of being justified which is entirely gratuitous, hanging not on man's desert but on

* Cf. the use of λύτρα in Num. xxxv. 31 (LXX.) speaking of the murderers for whose blood no ransom was to be accepted.

God's grace, must be impartial and catholic. It is offered on such easy terms, because on no harder terms could helpless and condemned men receive it. But all men are equally condemned and helpless. This St. Paul has of late been busy proving. Heathen or Jew, there is no distinction between men (ver. 22) such as could limit a gratuitous righteousness to one set of them rather than to another. They have equally failed to attain the reward of righteousness by their own works. All of them alike sinned. All alike have missed or fallen short of that praise which those who are righteous in their own merit deserve from God. Therefore they must be justified, if they are justified at all, on a ground which cuts away every distinction of better or worse among them, of more deserving or less deserving. Bring men back to stand together on a common ground as merely guilty sinners, and you leave absolutely no room for choice amongst us. A righteousness which is given away gratuitously to the guilty, must be meant for all and offered to all—without distinction.*

Yes, to all men, that is to say, who will trust in it (ver. 26). For, fourth, there is a limiting condition of an inward subjective nature—just because there is a limiting condition of an outward nature. Gratuitous justification has been rendered possible through the redeeming death of Jesus Christ. That is the limiting channel through which alone it can reach us. That is the solitary act of God on the ground of which it became historically possible for God to justify any. For this very reason He can justify those only who trust to that ground for it, and consent to receive it through that channel.† Our justification is limited

* This appears from the words in ver. 22, *εἰς πάντας* (*καὶ ἐπὶ πάντας*, if this addition is to be trusted) . . . . *οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολή.*

† It is always to be understood, of course, that statements of this description apply only to hearers of the Gospel who are in a position either to receive or to reject its offer. They leave entirely out of view the case

to faith in Christ as its inward condition just because it is limited to the work of Christ as its external basis. Our faith is the natural counterpart to Christ's atonement. It is our response to His sacrifice; it is our acceptance of God's terms. God offers to justify us, but He does so only because Christ has propitiated for our sins. On that great transaction He takes His stand; since solely on the ground of it can He make such an overture of grace. We, therefore, in dealing with His offer must deal with it under the same restrictions. It is an offer to justify us on the footing of Christ's propitiation; for on no other footing could God justify us. If we accept His offer, we consent to be justified on that same ground of Christ's propitiation, for nothing else is offered. The very terms on which God historically vindicated His justice and wrought redemption, tie us down and limit us to faith—such faith as rests on Christ Jesus—as the instrument of our justification. It is not arbitrarily limited to such as believe by way of making a selection or restricting the gratuitous grace of God to one certain class of men only, or as if some by virtue of their faith could merit it more than the rest of mankind. It is offered and pressed upon all men of every class as equally in need and equally welcome. Only it lies in the very nature of the case that whosoever refuses to repose his hope of acceptance with God upon the revealed basis of Christ's atonement, shuts himself out and never can be justified at all—since even God Himself knows or can compass no other method for acquitting a guilty man.

See, then, in conclusion, what our actual position is during this Gospel period in which we live. Looking back to the pre-Christian ages, we find the Eternal Judge

of persons who either never hear it or are otherwise incompetent to deal with it.

of all keeping silence while men transgressed; giving occasional hints of His wrath against their evil-doing, and holding out to one race at least a promise that some day He would open a fountain of forgiveness; but in point of fact, neither fully avenging sin nor atoning fully for it. Thus human sin was suffered to pile itself up till the very justice of God was obscured. At last, after men had practically discovered that by their own obedience they could not clear themselves from guilt, God Himself entered into history for the purpose of doing it for them. He came to offer once for all an ample satisfaction for the sins of men. The unspeakable Sacrifice whose divineness puts it outside all price or computation—the Sacrifice of God in human nature and for humanity—was actually consummated in the world's sight, at a given spot, on a given day. We live, thank God! on the hither side of this immense fact, a fact which did at one stroke revolutionise the attitude of God to human sinners. We behold, lying behind us as a thing done, the great death which has expiated our guilt, has vindicated the justice of God when He justifies us, has restored us to the approval of the Judge, has torn across our sentence and set open the doors of our prison. On that cross, God's justice, dumb before, has uttered its awful voice; God's mercy, that spoke before in muffled tones, has rung out clear and sweet; God's justice and mercy speak together in one voice more eloquent than the words of any preacher. There remains literally no more to do but for each one of us to fall back for himself upon the divine deed which has achieved our redemption through the expiation of our guilt, and with new-born confidence in God, and with overflowing grati tude and with adoring love, to rest there—on the work which God hath wrought.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LEVELLING GOSPEL.

"Where then is the glorying? It is excluded. By what manner of law? of works? Nay: but by a law of faith. We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yea, of Gentiles also: if so be that God is one, and he shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith."—ROM. iii. 27–30.

NATIONAL pride was characteristic of the Jews in St. Paul's day. Certainly no people ever had such a history to be proud of, such long annals, such famous ancestors, or a literature of such spiritual depth and insight. But it was not merely of these they boasted. Alone among nations, it was of their religion they were most proud. They could not pretend at that period to be a powerful people, politically strong or formidable in war. But when their fortunes were at the lowest, their territory ruled by foreigners, their language extinct, their faith persecuted, their very existence as a nationality tolerated only because they were feeble—even then they had one point of superiority left. Secure in being the selected favourites of heaven, they found in their sole possession of Jehovah's favour and in the hope of what Jehovah would one day do for them, a consolation so flattering to their patriotism that they not only clung to it as a compensation under obloquy or disaster, but in their deepest fall could still look down upon their heathen conquerors with pity.

There was just sufficient foundation for this feeling to render it excusable. Unfortunately, in the case of many of them, it took a shape which proved disastrous to religious life. It was one thing to be patriotically proud of God's favour for the ancestors of their race or of the exceptional place He had assigned them in the unfolding of salvation for the world. It was quite another thing for an individual Jew to fancy that he had thereby inherited some exceptional claim on divine approval. Yet this was a temptation which lay so close at hand that numbers of Jews fell into it. The state of mind thus produced may have been somewhat like this: By being born a Jew of pure blood and circumcised into the covenant which God had made thousands of years before with Abraham, a man conceived that he occupied a position of peculiar nearness to his Maker. Jehovah was his national God; loved him as He did not love the outside heathen world; and had admitted him to special means for securing everlasting happiness. In particular, Jehovah had given to him a very sacred and ancient Law. That Law, partly moral, partly ceremonial, needed only to be kept with a scrupulous regard for its minuter details, and then each act of obedience to it went to heighten the favour with which God viewed His servant and to procure for the man a still larger share in those delights which after death awaited the pious Israelite. So that one who from infancy to mature age had been trained in the habitual exercises of Mosaism and had religiously observed its prescribed mode of life, came to be, simply on that ground, quite sure of God's approbation. He looked forward to the Judgment Day with perfect confidence because he had in store an abundant stock of meritorious services dutifully or obsequiously paid in compliance with divine command.

It is necessary to keep this in view when we read St.

Paul; for this was exactly the state of mind in which he had himself been brought up. After God showed him a better way of acceptance through Christ, he scarcely ever refers to the subject of justification without assailing this Jewish boastfulness in "the works of the Law," of which he himself had been an example, in order that he may refute and cast it down. This is what he is doing in our present section. Having reached as the natural termination to his long argument, this conclusion (verse 26), that God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is able with perfect justice to acquit and justify any sinner who trusts to that way of salvation, he suddenly halts in his flow of reasoning, and, as though he were looking round to survey the field in search of something which had vanished out of sight, he abruptly asks: "Where then is the boasting of the Jew?" "It is shut out." There is no more room left for it. What shuts it out? What sort of law,* or rule of divine procedure in the judging and justifying of men, is that which can exclude boasting? Certainly not a law of works such as the Mosaic Law was when understood to prescribe obedience as the condition of reward. Not that; for if a man earn reward by his own obedience, he has ground for boasting. Not that; for, though it was never meant to be so perverted, yet in point of fact the Mosaic Law had proved itself the fruitful occasion of Jewish self-confidence. So far from shutting it out, as by all reason any law ought to have done which judged and sentenced men for their transgressions against God, that Mosaic Law had bred in Hebrew hearts a crop of religious self-conceit and self-flattery. No: boasting is actually excluded only under this new and better way of being righteous before God which has just been explained, this other "rule" of divine administration, which justifies a

* So literally, διὰ ποίου νόμου. v. 27

sinner who trusts in God. This cuts self-righteousness down by the roots, as nothing else can do. This throws a man, not back upon his own merits, but forward on the mercy of God through the merits of Another. This leaves him a debtor to sovereign grace alone. Boasting, then, the hereditary national fault of the Jew, is excluded only by the "law" of faith—for the "law of faith" as we hold it, is this:—that a man is justified on believing, without his keeping of the Law being at all included as any reason for his justification.*

This vicious boastfulness which St. Paul sought to root out of the hearts of his countrymen is not a thing essentially Jewish. At bottom, it is a child of human pride. It has its birthplace in every human heart. No man likes to own to himself that he has literally not an inch of ground to stand on before the judgment seat of God, nor a scruple's weight of merit to plead there, nor the faintest shadow of a claim on the Judge for anything but condemnation. There is nothing a man dislikes more than that. You have only to be quite honest with your own feelings when you take your conduct strictly to task, in order to find that out. A certain pride of moral superiority over others when all comes to all, is the very breath of life to a man so long as he is only religious "after the flesh," or in the way that unrenewed human nature can be religious. Rob him of that and you rob him of all the poor hope or comfort for hereafter which he has to live on. For that, therefore, the man does battle as for dear life. Do you believe the man breathes who is so bad that he has not anything, not

* γὰρ is the reading, as I think, to be preferred in verse 28, not δυν, although the latter is adopted by the Revisers, following (like Tischendorf and others) the authority of MS. B. I take the verse to be a recapitulation of the position already proved, in order to sustain verse 27, which is based upon it.

one rag of imaginary goodness, left to cover his nakedness? Very "ragged" our "righteousnesses" may be, and very "filthy" too, but we cannot afford to let them go, to stand ashamed, in unscreened exposure to the light that judges us, defenceless before the pitiless judgment of God. Can we not? Then where is there salvation for us on Paul's teaching? Salvation is for men, he says, who trust to God's mercy for it and to Christ's merits: and that "law" shuts boasting out. The last wretched shred of self-conceit must go. Not a rag of merit is left to flaunt with in the sight of heaven. Alone, naked, defenceless, condemned, one must be and must feel oneself to be and must confess oneself to be, before it is possible to put one's trust in the gratuitous justification provided in Christ by the mercy of God.

A characteristic of this self-justifying boastfulness is that it climbs upon every point of preference or advantage which is supposed to lift one sinner a little above his fellow-sinners. It lives by making comparisons; such invidious and foolish comparisons as Paul speaks of when he talks of people "measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves."* Such diversities exist among men in the degree of their moral delinquency, and God's providence gives to some such an advantage over others in respect of religious privilege, that differences of this sort become a perfect hot-bed for breeding spiritual pride. The Jew trusted in his peculiar position, simply because there was a deal in his religious position which was peculiar and tempted him to trust in it. Wherever any other man has been exposed to similar temptation, you find a similar crop of self-righteous confidence. When God singles out one race from other races, or one class in society before another class, or one individual

* 2 Corinthians x. 12.

among others, for exceptional religious advantages, He certainly does not mean to puff up the favoured elected one with spiritual conceit. It is nothing but the abnormal working of man's evil nature which perverts or misuses what is intended for a blessing. Still, it is a constant action of the evil heart under parallel circumstances. Called Jew or called Gentile, a man always does—unless grace prevent—so pervert and misuse his superior privileges. Therefore we can afford to throw no stones at ancient Israel. It was very proud of its divine Law and looked down on the whole Gentile world as unclean: do we Christians never boast ourselves to be far above the blinded Jew or the benighted heathen? Your Israelite conceived himself safe for eternity because he had been duly circumcised and observed the festivals of the sacred year: does your Christian never build any hope of heaven on his good Churchmanship or unchallenged profession of religion? Jews like Saul toiled hard to deserve paradise by a great zeal for orthodoxy and a scrupulous life: did no one ever hear of any Christian doing the like?

It is worth while, therefore, to observe that this tendency to presume upon exceptional privileges as if they made a man sure of exceptional favour from God, rests at bottom on the false assumption that God will have two ways of dealing with sinners at last—one way for the privileged and one way for the unprivileged. Against this assumption it is curious to see what a mighty engine Paul brings to bear in this passage. The force of his logic at this point is apt to be missed by the reader because it is so brief. When expanded, his argument in the 29th and 30th verses, is to the following effect:—

"Or," if I am wrong in holding (verse 28) that every man, even a Jew, is to be justified apart from his own obedience to Law; if you Jews are right in thinking, on

the contrary, that God means your observance of Mosaic rules to be the ground of your acceptance with Him ;—then look where that will land you! In that case, must not "God be the God only of Jews?" Since it is only to Jews, and not to Gentiles, He has given this Mosaic Law, "Is He not the God of Gentiles as well?" Is it not the very prime point of your contention, as against the "gods many and lords many" of the heathen world, that there is only one living and true God—Jehovah—the Maker and the Judge and the Saviour of all men alike? But how is it consistent with that to say that He has given to you Jews a law by which you are to be justified, and has given no such law to the Gentiles by which they might be justified? Is He a God for one section of the human family and not for another? Or can He who is One have one plan of dealing with sinners of one nation and a different plan for sinners of another nation? Surely God, "if so be that He is One," must be one in His moral administration. Surely His unity demands that He shall act on common principles towards all, "justifying circumcised men (if He justify them at all) by faith, and uncircumcised men equally through the same faith."

The foundation of this reasoning lies in the doctrine of monotheism. It was therefore peculiarly telling against that national pride of particularism in the Hebrew people, which while sternly upholding that their God was the God of the whole earth, yet dreamt that somehow He would judge and save them on different principles from the rest of mankind. It is no less fit to tell upon the modern Jew, wherever devout Jews nowadays are disposed to hear, and candid enough to weigh, plain reasoning from such a countryman of their own as Paul. To this day, the orthodox Israelite is understood to observe the rites and duties of that national Law which God

gave by Moses, as a means of commending himself to God. In other words, he expects to be saved *as a Jew*, in a peculiar way, through which no man who is not a Jew can possibly be saved. Salvation on this theory is not only *of* the Jews (as Jesus the Jew taught it was) but *for Jews only*—or, if any other man dare hope to be acquitted at last, it must be on a different principle. Certainly it cannot be by keeping the Mosaic Law. And yet the God of the Jew is the God of the Gentile too. The cleft which cuts the human race into these two portions—Jew and Gentile—is a very deep one; it cuts far down; but it cannot cut so far as this. "How shall man be just with his Maker?" is a problem which can admit of only one answer: not—in this way, if he be a Jewish man, and in that other way, or no way at all, if he be a Gentile man. The priority of privilege and of grace which it pleased the common Father of all to bestow upon our Hebrew brothers, is a splendid favour from His hands, a glorious crown of eminence on their brows; and we, who call Jesus our Lord, can bear them no grudge on that account. But it does not go so far as this, that to them only God has set open the appointed gate to life. No right-hearted Jew can believe that. No word of their ancient books, no utterance of their inspired teachers, ever taught them that. Yet to such a conclusion it must come, if salvation be a prize to be won by dutifully observing the Law of Moses. No: it never was by dutifully observing the Law of Moses that any devout Jew found favour with God. From Abraham downwards, God had for His Hebrew children another way of justification—the way of lowly, penitent, self-emptying faith, of a confidence which rested not upon their own merits but on the mercy and promises of God Himself. The same way of justification God has now set open also to His

Gentile children; that by faith in His one Messiah, we all, circumcised or uncircumcised, may pass together into reconciliation with our common Father in heaven.

This levelling argument of the Apostle is good for more than Hebrews. Let us look at our own position. We are privileged men. As Christians, as Protestants, as Englishmen; as the children of devout parents who saw to our being early baptized and reared in the faith and nurture of saints; you may seek the wide world over for a company of men selected to richer religious privilege. Must we shut our eyes to these distinguishing mercies of Heaven, or shrink from owning that we are highly favoured? By no means. As little as Paul shrank from extolling in their due place the pre-eminent "gifts and calling" of God in the case of His loved and chosen Israel. Deep joy and a certain tender and fearful gratitude become us well. Having received much, we owe much—much thanks, much love, much fruit. Only let no soul of us boast because we have been selected for such distinction in the kingdom of heaven. Let none of us, on the strength of pious parents, or orthodox teaching, or Church membership, or unspotted Christian reputation, plume himself upon the favour of God as one who stands a better chance for eternity than foreign idolaters or the classes at home whom we send "missions" to convert. Is not this (as it were) to postulate a two-faced God—One who pardons very wicked and ignorant people in sheer grace, out of pure regard to the work of Jesus Christ, but who receives respectable Christian people on another footing, allowing a certain weight to their general moral character and correct religious belief? There is no fear that any evangelical Christian will say such things. The ear is shocked to hear them said. What may well be feared is that some do, without at all knowing it, harbour a self-righteous confidence in

these accidental advantages of Christian position and character. Against such a temptation we have to fight with the weapon of St. Paul. It is a levelling Gospel which we have to preach. The best and the worst equally sue for a boon which they have done nothing to deserve. They must stand side by side, abashed and guilty, to be covered over with the mantle of the Reconciler, to be washed in His blood, and to enter the celestial city only at His intercession.

CHAPTER IX.

A CRUCIAL CASE.

"Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law. What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not toward God. For what saith the scripture? And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness. Even as David also pronounceth blessing upon the man, unto whom God reckoneth righteousness apart from works, *saying*, blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin. Is this blessing then pronounced upon the circumcision, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say, To Abraham his faith was reckoned for righteousness. How then was it reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision: and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be in uncircumcision, that righteousness might be reckoned unto them; and the father of circumcision to them who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham which he had in uncircumcision. For not through the law was the promise to Abraham or to his seed, that he should be heir of the world, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise is made of none effect: for the law worketh wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there transgression. For this cause *it is* of faith, that *it may be* according to grace; to the end that the promise may be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, A father of many nations have I made thee) before him whom he believed, *even* God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth the things that are not, as though they were. Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, So shall thy seed be.

And without being weakened in faith, he considered his own body now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb: yea, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. Wherefore also it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned unto him: but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification."—ROM. iii. 31; iv.

ST. PAUL has just shown how the Gospel method of gratuitous justification for every sinner who trusts to God's grace through Jesus Christ, shuts out the usual Hebrew boast in the Mosaic Law as a pathway to eternal life. But it might seem to some Hebrew readers as if it did a good deal more than that. This new doctrine of justification by faith, St. Paul contended, set aside the Law of Moses as a ground of acceptance with God: did it not set it aside altogether? Jews who had been trained to think of their national Law as given with this very design, that by keeping it they might deserve a reward in heaven such as no uncircumcised man could ever claim, might well fear lest to deprive it of this value would deprive it of all value, and leave it utterly empty or invalid.

To this difficulty* there were two answers possible.

The most obvious answer, and the one which we should naturally have expected, would be this: The Law had other ends to serve. This reply St. Paul actually gives when he comes across the same difficulty in his letter to Galatia. "What then is the Law? It was added because of transgressions." . . . . It "kept us in ward, shut us up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." . . . . It "hath been our tutor to bring us unto Christ."† Some-

* Stated in the last verse of the third chapter, which ought properly to open the fourth.

† Galatians iii. 19, 23, 24.

thing like this, in fact, Paul has already implied in this very letter to Rome, where he defined the design of the Law to be: "That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God." *

Here, however, it is a different answer which he gives: one less obvious, and the force of which it is less easy to catch. He answers by alleging the case of Abraham, which at much length he discusses through this fourth chapter. There is some difficulty in seeing how the example of Abraham's justification by faith bears upon the statement which it seems † brought in to illustrate, viz., that justification by faith does not invalidate but rather establish the Law of Moses (ch. iii. 31). The force of the argument may be somewhat like this: The reward which nearly every Jew hoped to secure for himself through his circumcision and his observance of the Mosaic Law could be nothing else than the national blessing which God had promised to the chosen people from the very commencement of His relations with them. That blessing had been originally conferred by covenant upon the ancestor of the race as the representative of his seed. It was in the character of a descendant of Abraham that each Jew received in his flesh the seal of the national covenant or had a right to aspire after the national hope. Nothing higher, therefore, could be looked for by any Israelite than to attain to the blessedness of his forefather Abraham. Nor could any words better express the supreme felicity of a Jew's heaven, than to say that he should lie for ever and banquet in Abraham's bosom.‡ Yet this special favour had been promised to

* Romans iii. 19.

† This difficulty has pressed upon some good interpreters (as Philippi, *e.g.*), so much as to lead them to acknowledge no connection between the fourth chapter and the thirty-first verse of the third. But the objections to this abrupt change of topic, urged by Meyer and others, appear to me insuperable.

‡ See Luke xvi. 22.

their great ancestor and received by him, not certainly in consequence of his observance of Mosaic Law, which was not given for a great while after, not even in consideration of his being circumcised, but solely because he was a believer in the gracious promises of God. Abraham himself, in short, was justified by faith. The whole national life of Israel is thus seen to have rooted itself historically in God's grace and man's trust in God's grace; not at all in Moses' Law or man's obedience to that. The Law did not come in till "four hundred and thirty years after."* Instead of God's covenant with Israel resting on the Law —the Law on the contrary rested on the covenant. That covenant was, to begin with, one of grace not of works. So far, therefore, from Paul's doctrine of justification being a new theory upsetting or undoing the Mosaic Law, it was in point of fact just the old teaching of the very earliest "Book of the Law." On this principle had God's dealings with Israel from the first proceeded; on it accordingly the Mosaic legislation itself must be supposed to rest. Do we, then, make the Law of Moses void, St. Paul might well ask, by making faith the medium of our acceptance with God? Far from it. On the contrary, we establish that Law: since we find for it its ancient basis on which alone it can serve those helpful uses for which it was given.

The case of Abraham was thus, as St. Paul clearly saw, a crucial instance in which to test his doctrine of justification by faith. In the eleventh of Hebrews we have a long list of Old Testament saints who all lived and overcame by faith. Any one of these might have served to show that what St. Paul preached was no novel way of

* Galatians iii. 17. See on this whole argument the train of reasoning in Galatians iii. 6–23, where the steps are given with greater distinctness than in Romans. The comparison of the two epistles is here most fruitful.

salvation. But no other one could have silenced Jewish objectors so well as this case of their first father. Abraham was not merely the first of Israelites or the greatest of them: he was all Israel in his single person. The whole of the supernatural relations to God by which Hebrew annals had been illuminated lay as in a germ within the primeval covenant which it pleased Jehovah to conclude with that grandest of the patriarchs—the man who came out of Mesopotamia. It would never do for a Jew to pretend that a principle which ruled the relations of Abraham to Jehovah could by any possibility make void the Law of Moses.

The example of Abraham proves fruitful for St. Paul's purpose in more ways than one. His controversy with his countrymen up to this point has involved two main positions. The first is this: "That a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law" (ch. iii. 28). The second is this: That "God is one, and therefore He will justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith" (ch. iii. 30). In other words, he has maintained: first, that there is justification for no man except by trusting in God's grace; next, that there is justification for every man who does so trust. Both positions he now proceeds to illustrate, and, while he illustrates them, to confirm, by the case of Abraham.

1. *It was by his faith Abraham was justified, not by his works of obedience* (ch. iv. 1–8).

Paul's proof of this is very simple. He finds a remarkable proof-text ready to his hand in Genesis xv. 16. Let us recall how it occurs. The religious life of Abraham as it is related to us in the oldest book in the Bible, gathers round three leading moments: The first, when God bade him emigrate from his kindred and adopted home in Haran to become a wandering sheikh in the unknown

region which lay betwixt the Jordan and the Mediterranean (Genesis xii. 1–5); the second, at Mamre, when God first made with the childless and aged man an explicit covenant that he should yet have a son of whom should issue an innumerable posterity, and that to this posterity should be given long afterwards for a dwelling-place and possession the fair rich land over which he had roamed as a nomad sheepmaster (Genesis xv.); the third, when the first portion of this promise having been fulfilled in the birth of Isaac as well as the whole of it sealed by the rite of circumcision, it pleased Jehovah to test His servant's confidence in it by commanding the Child of Promise to be sacrificed (Genesis xxii.). At all these three turning-times in the development of Abraham's spiritual history, his confidence in God (his "faith," as it is usually termed) appeared in relief as the most eminent feature of his character. Plainly, the first of these three, his migration from Haran to Canaan, was preliminary to the second, which conveyed to him the promises of God; and the third, or sacrifice of Isaac, was a consequent of the second. The central point, therefore, in the patriarch's whole history is to be sought for in that great day when Jehovah covenanted with Him on the basis of a twofold promise: the promise, first, of a large and blessed posterity; and the promise, second, of a land of inheritance for his seed to dwell in.* Now it is in connection with Abraham's share in this marvellous transaction with God that those words occur which St. Paul found to be so significant for his purpose.† On God's side, there was simply a word

* Both promises had been anticipated, indeed: the promise of seed when he came from Haran, cf. Genesis xv. 5, and xii. 2, 3, and the promise of the land when he first entered Canaan, cf. xv. 7 with xii. 7. But now for the first time the two promises are amplified and made the joint basis of a solemn covenant which includes them both, cf. Genesis xv. 8–21.

† They are cited again in Galatians iii. 6.

announcing the promises of His grace ; on the man's side, simply a devout and childlike reliance upon that word. God asked no more : and the man had no more to give. His mere trust in God the Promiser was held to be adequate as a ground for that sinful man's acceptance into favour, friendship and league with the eternal Jehovah. In the words of the sacred and venerable text (as St. Paul cites it) "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness;"* that is, for a ground of his justification and acceptance with God.

The Apostle's argument on this ancient text is a very obvious one. There are no more than two ways of obtaining divine approval. Either you deserve it, having earned it as a workman does his wages; then it is no favour but a pure debt, and you have something to be proud of and to boast in. Or else, not having earned the wages of divine approval but the wages of sin, which is death, you trust in the promised grace of One who justifies the ungodly; then it may be said that this trust of yours is reckoned as equivalent to righteousness. It does for you, the ungodly, what the righteous man's righteousness does for him. Now, Abraham's acceptance was plainly of this latter sort. He, therefore, at least, had no ground for pride or boasting in the presence of God. His, rather, was such blessedness as his great descendant David praised so long after in his song;† the blessedness of the sinner to whom Jehovah does not reckon his sins, but on the contrary covers them out of sight and puts them for ever away out of remembrance. Not to impute to the sinner his sins but to count his faith for righteousness, are two sides to one beatitude.

* So the LXX. ; but the Hebrew reads : "Abraham believed Jehovah and *He counted it* to him for righteousness."

† Psalm xxxii. 1, 2.

The second position in St. Paul's contention with his countrymen likewise received confirmation from the history of their "first father."

2. *Abraham was justified by his faith, not as a circumcised man, but as an uncircumcised* (verses 9–16).

It lies in the very idea of acceptance through faith, that wherever faith is present, there God will accept the sinner apart from any other circumstance, such as nationality, or an external rite, or church privilege, or the like. If faith saves a man, then faith must save every man who has it. This inference from his doctrine Paul has been pressing on his Jewish readers, as one which of necessity broke down their favourite restriction of salvation to circumcised persons only. Here, then, is a very curious confirmation of it. Abraham, through whom came circumcision itself with all other Hebrew privileges—how, or in what state, was he taken into divine favour and justified by his faith? Notoriously, it was previous to his circumcision. Years after that great day of his first covenanting with God, when his faith in the promise was counted for righteousness (thirteen years after at the very least, as the history in Genesis proves,)* God returned to His servant to renew His promises; and then it was, not before, that God gave him a permanent and unmistakable token imprinted on his flesh to ratify as with a signet the covenant made with him and his seed. In this historical sequence of the events, the Apostle sees a divine purpose and reads a divine lesson. Abraham was a believer before he was circumcised. He was a justified man as soon as he was a believer, not as soon as he was circumcised.

* By comparing his age at Ishmael's birth, eighty-six years, with his age at his circumcision, ninety-nine years: cf. Genesis xvi. 16, and xvii. 24. The first covenanting was before Ishmael's birth (see Genesis xv. 3), but how long before we do not know.

Circumcision came in simply to attest a state of acceptance with God which already existed; to seal, not to constitute, his justification. And the design of such an arrangement was to make him the true type and spiritual progenitor of all believers:—of such believers first, as are never circumcised at all, since for thirteen long years or more he was himself an uncircumcised believer; then of such also as are circumcised, indeed, yet not circumcised only, but, like him, believers too. The believing life of Abraham, but of no other representative man, covers these two states: first, believing, but not circumcised—that answers to Gentile Christians; second, believing and circumcised as well—that represents Jews who walk in the steps of his faith. He is "the father of us all." The only people whom his experience fails to embrace, whose "father" and representative he really is *not*, are those Jews who are circumcised but not believing; who trust in their lineage and their covenant badge and their keeping of the law, expecting to be saved for their meritorious observance of prescribed rules; but who in the free and gracious promises of Abraham's God put no trust at all!

Having got thus far, one sees how St. Paul has reached this notable conclusion: that so far from his doctrine of justification by faith making the Law of Moses void, it is the Jewish figment of justification by the Law which makes void God's promise and Abraham's faith and the whole basis of grace on which the privileges of the Hebrew people ultimately reposed. Here, therefore, he fairly turns the tables upon his objectors (ver. 14): "If" says he at the close of his reasoning, "they who keep the Mosaic Law are (as such) heirs of the divine promise made to Abraham and his seed, then faith is made void—not the Law but *faith*;—the faith by which Abraham received the promise at first; ay, and the very promise itself,

having been made only to faith, becomes an annulled or abrogated promise!" This, I repeat, is a notable conclusion. For a Jew to put his trust, as most Jews did, in his own compliance with Moses' Law as the ground of his acceptance with God, is virtually to invalidate or repudiate that very covenant of grace made with him in his "first father," on which his whole national standing and religious privileges historically hinge. It is to break with the beginnings of Hebrew history. It is actually to shut himself outside of the covenant of promise and the hopes of his race.*

Nay, more: another conclusion emerges. It turns out now that, instead of St. Paul being an apostate or disloyal Jew for admitting believing Gentiles to an equal place in the favour of Israel's God, it is his self-righteous country-

* The fact is, as St. Paul here interjects in his rapid parenthetic fashion (ver. 15), to rest one's hope of divine favour on the Law is to misconceive both the design and the effect of law. What the Law does is to aggravate divine displeasure, not to win divine favour; for it deepens human sin into wilful transgression of a known command; since in the absence of law, "there can be no transgression of it." The introduction of this favourite distinction of our Apostle's (to which he is to revert presently in the next chapter) looks at first sight a little out of place here and even disturbing to the course of reasoning. It ought to be noted, however, that he has already begun to think of the case of Gentiles (of which he is in act to speak from ver. 16 onwards); and it may be that this re-awakens in his mind the contrast betwixt the half conscious sins of heathens "without law," and the more criminal sins of Jews "under the Law," to which in an earlier chapter (chap. ii.) he has already paid marked attention. Such side-play of thought, darting off from the main line of discussion to another aspect of the subject, is at all events highly characteristic of our author. No other great writer leaves on the reader such an impression of *impromptu* composition. He writes as a lively-minded conversationist talks, on the spur of the moment, with interjected glances at lines of thought which he does not stay to work out. May not this be in part accounted for by his habit of dictating his letters? In a life so busy as his, one may conjecture that what was thus hastily taken down while he nervously paced his chamber underwent next to no revision by the author, but was despatched as it came hot from his lips.

man, who monopolises divine grace and will have no Gentile to be saved unless he has first become a circumcised observer of Moses' Law, that is really false to the original idea of the Abrahamic covenant. For the promised inheritance of God was at first suspended neither upon law-observance, nor even upon circumcision, but simply and solely upon faith. This was done with the express design, that the said promise might be secured to the whole seed of Abraham: not narrowed to his literal legal descendants, who lived under Mosaic institutions; but open also to that other wider portion who are the children only of Abraham's faith—his spiritual "seed." So, then, it really lay in the terms of the original covenant that the kingdom of heaven should be opened to all believers. How else could that great word have been fulfilled which said to him: "I have made thee a father (not of one, but) of many nations"? (Cf. vers. 16, 17, *a*.) All who have faith, whatever their race, are "blessed with faithful Abraham:" * and he, says Paul, writing to a Gentile Church, "is the father of us all."

The Apostle has now completed his polemic against Jewish objectors. Before, however, he is done with the case of Abraham, there is a further use to be made of his bright exemplar. The father of believers is good for more than polemical or controversial purposes. He to whom God first made those promises which are for all who confide in Him, with whom, as the type and head of all believers, God first entered into specific covenant relations of friendship, is one who stands out in the sacred story as, not simply a specimen of the faith that justifies or saves but as the best of all specimens, highest pattern and lesson in this grace to all his spiritual progeny. His faith, there-

* See Gal. iii. 8.

fore, St. Paul now examines, eulogises, and holds up as a model for Christian believers (ch. iv. 17–25).

I spoke of three leading moments in the spiritual life of this great patriarch at which his faith shone brightly. In the roll of heroes in faith given in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, stress is laid upon the first of these, his migration at God's call into a foreign land, and upon the last of them, his sacrifice of Isaac.* Here, on the other hand, it is the central fact of his acceptance of God's covenant promises with which St. Paul has been dealing; and it is this proof of faith, therefore, which he now proceeds to examine.

The particular promise which God asked the man at that time to believe was this: That when he was ninety-nine and his wife ninety a son should be born to them. On this Child of Promise were made to depend all the other promises—numerous descendants, the land of inheritance, a perpetual covenant and seed in whom all earth's families should be blessed. Messiah Himself (as Abraham well knew†), as well as all else that went with the seed of promise, hung upon the supernatural birth of Isaac. To believe in this explicit word: "I will bless Sarah and give thee a son also of her, . . . and I will establish My covenant with him"—was to believe substantially in the whole of God's grace to men in so far as it was then revealed. It was Gospel faith so far as there was yet any Gospel on earth to put faith in. Faith is a living personal attachment to God by an absolute trust in Him and in every word He speaks. Such faith in God is one and the same whether He has told us much or little. Dimly and far off Abraham saw that through the birth of a son when he was past age the day of Christ, that promised

* Heb. xi. 8–10; 17–19.

† Compare Christ's words in John viii. 56.

Saviour and Seed of blessing, was somehow to draw nigh; and at God's bare word he risked his spiritual life upon that hope.

This was his faith. Now note its characteristics. On the one side lay the improbabilities of an unheard-of miracle; a future miracle, too, to be believed in before it happened; a needless miracle, even, so far as man's reason could discern; for was not Ishmael already there, a dear son of Abraham's body? On the other side, what was there? Nothing but a word of God. Between these two conflicting grounds of expectation a weaker faith than his might have wavered or swayed in hesitation from side to side—looking now to the natural probabilities and now to the divine authority, uncertain how the issue might turn out at last. Abraham was not weak in faith. Therefore, he did not shrink (as a feeble believer might have done) from considering the physical obstacles to the birth of a son. On the contrary, he could afford to fasten his regard on these, without his confidence in the promise suffering any diminution;* since he kept no less clearly in view the character of the Almighty Promiser. God is the Quickener of the dead. He calls things which are not as if they were things which are. He can give a name and virtual existence to the yet unbegotten child. Isaac lives in God's counsel and purpose before he has actual being. Against outward experience, therefore, with no tangible basis for such a hope, Abraham dares to trust in the hope of paternity given him of God. Thus he gave God glory, by honouring the truthfulness of His word and the power of His grace. Such is faith: so it always works. Without calling its eyes off from the objections and difficulties

* This rests on the true reading (omitting *ὁυ* in verse 19 on the authority of the best MSS). which has now been made known to the English reader through the corrections of the Revisers.

which are present to sense, it fastens itself, nevertheless, on the veracity of Him who speaks words of grace to men. Where it is weak, it will hesitate; but where it is strong, it is assured that what God has promised He is able to do. Its essence is that it gives God glory by holding to Him against all appearances and all comers.

These things were not written for Abraham's sake alone; they were written for ours. Abraham trusted in God to quicken his unborn son—by and by to raise him (if need were) from the dead. We trust Him who did quicken in the flesh and raise from the dead His own supernatural Son Jesus. The Gospel facts, the Gospel promises, and the blessings of the new covenant in Christ, are to us what the birth of Isaac was to Abraham: things all of them beyond the reach of experience or against it—things past or future or absent or spiritual—things in one way or another undiscerned by sense and to reason improbable; resting for their evidence solely on the word of the living God. To that man they are very real things—more real than anything else—who believes in God before all others. To other men, they are quite unreal, shadowy, phantom-like, unbelievable. Such a faith in God is reckoned for righteousness to every man who has it, just as it was to Abraham, the father of all believers.

CHAPTER X.

IMMEDIATE RESULTS OF JUSTIFICATION.

"Being therefore justified by faith, let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; and let us rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but let us also rejoice in our tribulations: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, probation; and probation, hope: and hope putteth not to shame; because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Ghost which was given unto us. For while we were yet weak, in due season Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: for peradventure for the good man some one would even dare to die. But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life; and not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."—ROM. v. 1–11.

THE leading steps in St. Paul's argument pursued through the preceding chapters of this epistle have been, in brief, these:—

1. The world needed a new way to righteousness to be revealed, because all men were alike condemned and guilty. Pagan religion had issued in extreme moral corruption. Hebrew religion with its better light had only made Hebrew vice more conspicuous and inexcusable. Neither pagans nor Hebrews knew how to clear themselves at heaven's bar from the one fatal charge of *sin*. On the contrary, whatever religious light was to be found on earth only set in more painful relief the

extent of their guilt and the inevitableness of judgment (i. 18–iii. 20).

2. But now a fresh ground of acquittal from guilt, long heralded through a series of prophets, has been actually discovered to men's eyes in the incarnation and passion of the Son of God. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ as a propitiatory victim, is a fact which has at length explained to us God's strange forbearance all through the ages with the unexpiated sins of mankind, and makes it now a just thing for Him to acquit from guilt every sinner who trusts in Him: that is, to "justify them freely in His grace" (iii. 21–26).

3. This levelling truth strikes at the root of Jewish arrogance and self-righteousness, by treating all men alike, heathen or Jew, on precisely the same terms. It makes no account of the boasted Law of Moses as a ground of acceptance with God. At the same time, it does not at all invalidate the Mosaic Law in its own place. It cannot do so, indeed; because God's original covenant with Abraham himself and his seed after him, on which the Mosaic legislation afterwards came to rest, was a covenant the essential condition of which was faith. Abraham himself was accepted into divine favour, in a state of uncircumcision, solely on the ground that he was a believer. In fact, no more conspicuous example can be found to illustrate the doctrine that it is by faith, not works, we are to be justified, than the great father of the covenant people who is also the father of all believers (iii. 27–iv. 25).

By this prolonged course of reasoning the Apostle has not only established, but also defended against objections from the side of Judaism, his first main position laid down at the opening of the epistle; to wit, that in the Gospel God's-righteousness-by-faith has been revealed for men

to put their faith in (i. 17). The next great part of his task which opens now before him, is to prove with equal force that the Gospel, in virtue of its revealing God's-righteousness-by-faith, possesses a divine power able to save believers out of sin and death into the eternal life of holiness.* In other words, and in more technical language, St. Paul has still to show how justification by faith leads to a sanctified life, animated by the Holy Spirit and ending in the life everlasting.

Here, then, we have reached a turning point in the development of the Apostle's teaching. One chapter, so to say, is closed: the chapter whose title might be—"An exposition and defence of justification by faith in Christ without the deeds of the Law." Another chapter is about to open: a chapter whose title might be something like this: "The moral and spiritual results of justification by faith in the experience of the believer." To unfold these results; to show that, so far from the new teaching about justification encouraging men in sin (as, on a superficial view, it might be supposed to do), it affords the only security for practical holiness; and to trace the growth of a believer's spiritual life from the moment of his justification till it ends in the glorious liberty of the children of God;—this continues to be his theme down to the end of the eighth chapter. It is a theme on which his eloquence deepens and waxes more warm till it closes with a burst of triumphant thanksgiving.

In proceeding to study this section of the epistle, we have first to examine its opening paragraph with care. We shall find that in these stirring verses (ch. v. 1–11)

* This is the thesis stated in ch. i. 16: "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." To this ultimate thesis, the subordinate one in ch. i. 17, already discussed, is meant to lead up.

St. Paul has made this much at least plain—*That God's Gospel way of justifying a sinner on his believing affords the most ample ground to hope for the ultimate and complete salvation of every believer.*

How that hope is to be realised, the Apostle does not as yet say. Into the connection between a justified state and a holy life, he does not as yet enter. The *rationale* of a believer's sanctification—its difficulties—its motives; the whole of the inner or subjective effects of faith in Christ upon the moral nature of a man;—these things are postponed for the present. Taking his stand simply on the bare fact of justification through faith in Christ's atonement, and speaking in the name of his justified fellow-believers, St. Paul states the earliest and most obvious result of such a doctrine to be this: that he who accepts it cannot help expecting with a triumphant expectation that it will conduct him at last to a most glorious deliverance from evil. To be acquitted of guilt through the death of Jesus is the most elementary blessing which the Gospel fetches to our condemned race, shut up in its prison-house of wrath. But it cannot come alone. It opens a door of hope through which each reconciled sinner may look forward into a whole new world of lovely blessings following in its train. Hope is the key-word of this section, therefore—exultant hope of future glory; and the three ideas which successively emerge in its very rich and vivid sentences are these:—1. Our hope reposes on this new relation, established betwixt us and God, that we are at peace with Him. 2. Our hope is not impaired, but confirmed, by our present tribulation. 3. Our hope is warranted by the proof which we already possess of the love of God for us.

A few words ought to make each of these points easy to any careful reader.

1. There is room now in men's hearts for the hope that

God will bless them with that glory which is His own blessedness, since now they are at peace with Him (verses 1, 2). This "peace *with* God," or "with respect to" God (πρὸς), which Paul says believers have through their justification, is probably neither their changed feelings toward God in Christ, nor their peace of conscience when assured of pardon, nor that deep peace of the spirit which is Christ's bequest and which passes understanding. It is true, no doubt, that the peace of reconciliation with God ought to mirror itself within the heart in such a placid and serene state of soul—a holy calm at the centre of the life. But this "peace with God," which is the *immediate* sequel to "being justified," must describe not a feeling, in the first instance, but rather a relationship betwixt man and God, out of which changed feelings may spring. Friendly affections grow out of friendly or pacific relations between two. The new relations created by our being "justified out of faith" are brought about by a reversal of attitude on both sides. It lies, however, in the nature of the case that this movement from an armed to a peaceful attitude, should imply first a change on the part of God and then also on the sinner's part as well.* Such a change is due in the first instance to the satisfying or atoning work of the Son. Not that God could possibly hate His sinful creature. He hateth nothing that He hath made, and the Gospel itself is a revelation of the extent to which He cherished "love for mankind."† But He does hate sin—the one thing which He hath *not* made; and men's sin, so long as it was unexpiated or unatoned for, forced

* The Revisers have adopted the reading ἔχωμεν in verse 1 ("Let us have peace") and if that be finally accepted, we shall have to choose betwixt two possible senses: either—"Let us acquiesce or rest in our new pacific relations in respect of God," or "Let us cultivate the peaceful feelings towards God which spring out of those relations."

† Cf. φιλανθρωπία in Titus iii. 4.

Him into an attitude of painful and reluctant antagonism, both personally (if one dare say so) and judicially. Antagonism is not hatred. It is not even the same thing as dislike. On the contrary, it may coexist with the most tender affection. After Absalom had avenged his sister by assassinating his half-brother, the sorrowing king and father refused to receive the murderer at court, although all the while his heart longed to go forth to his favourite. So were we to God, our tenderest Father, as that misguided fratricide was to David during the five long years of his banishment. God's face was of necessity the face of an adversary to His disloyal and criminal sons. Apart from the atonement, contemplated if not yet accomplished, He could not look on us; He could not have us near Him; He could not speak to us words of friendship. It may have been a greater trial by far to Him than it was to us. Still, a wicked man exposed to the wrath of the Judge, with his evil deeds lying unatoned upon his conscience, can never more be called "My friend," by the ever blessed and most pure Jehovah; while we, on our part, so long as we were unforgiven, were "enemies in our minds through wicked works," disliking God and resenting His claims.

See what a mighty revolution Christ's death wrought! It restored the right relationship by making satisfaction for human guilt. His blood was the propitiation—the peace-offering—for our crime. The obstacle which before had legally barred a sinful man's admission into friendship, was taken out of the way; and by the death of the Expiator we "have now had our access" into the favour of God. The offence being undone, the offended One is offended no longer. The "tremendous" Judge whom (against His will) our sin had armed and arrayed against our life, is become our willing Friend. A blessed

Mediator has brought us near who were far off, and set us in the place of favour. So soon as we become penitent believers, we enjoy access, by means of our faith in Christ, into this favour of the Father (verse 1); and standing in that grace, it is now possible for us to hope that we shall one day see and share the glory of God (verse 2). Before, it was not possible to hope. Enemies of God could never expect to behold His glory, or be satisfied with His likeness. His friends may. Greater than the change from midnight to noonday; more blessed than from horror to triumph: is this sudden change in the face of God towards His human creature! For aversion, favour; for threats, welcome; for condemnation, complacency; for a frown, a smile. All that in Him; and in our hearts, therefore, for blank despair of good, a new-born hope of coming glory! Standing thus near, within sight of the eye that kindles with a divine delight over His banished brought back; standing thus near, introduced by the hand that was pierced, and accepted in the Beloved who was slain—what is there for a justified believer to fear? What is there not for him to hope?

2. It is far off, that glory of God which we hope for. At least, it is still in the future. The present is for all of us a life of trouble. For Christian believers in St. Paul's day, it was eminently a lifetime of trouble. Does not this present pressing trouble of life, then, put such boastful hope in a coming glory to shame? Our mean, grieved, dying days, do they not flout and mock at such splendid expectations? Quite the contrary. In the long run, life's trouble is found rather to confirm our hope. How so? Why, in this way. Trouble works in us, if we are true believers, a steadfast endurance in the exercise of our faith —a holding on and holding out to the end. The Christian who thus perseveres under trouble, is an approved or

accredited believer.* Having stood that test, his faith is found genuine: neither a simulated confidence in God and His Christ, nor a shallow, short-lived growth which withers in sun heat; but a real, deep trust of the heart, such as lives and works and overcomes.† Is it not clear that when the tested Christian finds his faith has proved itself thus genuine, his hope will wax so much the more confident? There was hope to begin with; as soon as he entered into the peace of God, the believer began to expect the glory of God. By and by, through a roundabout process of trouble working perseverance, and perseverance working approval, and approval working hope, there is bred within the heart an increased expectation that these light and momentary afflictions will work out in the end an eternal weight of glory.‡

Not in any vainglorious temper of bravado, therefore, like fanatics of a later century who were in love with martyrdom for its own sake, did the Christians of St. Paul's day glory in tribulations. Yet they did glory in them. Worldly trouble even to spoiling and stripes they went cheerfully to meet, like warriors who are bound to win, to whom the field of battle seems a harvest-field where sheaves of honour and of gain are to be reaped. As the hope to be one day glorified with the glory of God is a thing to exult in—the very boast of Christian faith; so the believer learns to transfer that feeling of exultation even to those afflictions which in the long run minister to his future glory. Thus that strangest of all strange paradoxes comes true on Christian lips: "Not only so, but we boast in our tribulations also" (verse 3).

3. Once more, the triumphant hope of a justified believer

* The opposite is *ἀδόκιμος*. † Cf. Melancthon *in loc.*

‡ As a close parallel to the text, cf. James i. 12. For the thought, see also 2 Thess. i. 4–7.

in what God is yet to do for him, finds a still more sure and inexpugnable foundation of fact in what God has already done to prove the greatness of His love. This is the argument which fills the remainder of the section (verses 5–11). It is introduced in these words: "The hope I speak of does not put us to shame (by disappointing us), because God's love for us has been poured out in our hearts through means of the Holy Spirit who was given to us" at Pentecost (verse 5). This love of God for us which His Spirit pours out like a rich fruitful tide within the believer's heart, is that quite unparalleled love evinced in Christ's death for us while we were yet sinners (verses 6–8). And the force of the argument by which we infer from it that we may expect God to complete His saving work, is dwelt on in this *à fortiori* form: "If when we were still hostile, God reconciled us by the death of His Son, how much rather is it to be believed, that now, since we are His friends, He will save us by His Son's life?" It appears plain, therefore, that Paul regards all that still remains to be done for a Christian in order to sanctify him and fit him for final glory as an inferior test of divine kindness, costing less, and therefore less improbable, than what God already did in the sacrifice of Christ's life. He argues from the greater thing to the less. It is a much higher effort of generosity to reconcile an enemy than to save a friend. How much more true is this when to reconcile your enemy costs you life itself! When Christ died God afforded such a proof of love as transcended human example. It is barely possible to conceive of any man volunteering to lose his own life, even on behalf of a just man, although perhaps a few rare instances may have occurred to adorn the annals of human nature, in which for a signally kind man some lover or friend has been found to die. But the altogether unexampled feature

in the self-sacrifice of Christ lies here, that when He undertook to reconcile us by His death, we were still ungodly sinners and enemies to God. His *great* love was the love with which He loved us even when we were dead in sins. It was this very sinfulness, in fact, which made us morally "weak" and helpless, without strength, in need of such a Deliverer. When He saw us thus outcast in our blood, defiled, and perishing for want of any force of self-recovery, then He took compassion on us, and at the right moment —the predicted moment of our most extreme and manifest moral need—Christ the Son did die for us! This proof of love was supreme. Love was put then to its hardest task. It did not fail in that thing which was greatest; why should it fail in a less thing?

It is thus that St. Paul explains his implied statement, that whatever a justified believer has now to hope for from the love of God is a less thing than the death of Christ. On two sides it is less incredible and strange.

For one thing, God's attitude towards us is now changed for the better. Instead of showing kindness to sinners, He has now to show it to justified men. Instead of being His enemies against whom He had a just ground of quarrel very hard to be got over—we are His friends, reconciled to His favour by the blood of His Son. Suppose, therefore, that He were even called upon to do for us now as much or at a cost as grievous to Himself, as He once did when Jesus died, would not the love which went to death then for the enemy, be more likely to go to death a second time for the friend?

But in the next place, it is no such grievous thing He needs to do for us now. To reconcile us when we were alienated by our crimes, called for the death of the Reconciler. To save us now and bring us back to the glory of God, is to be the work of the Saviour's life. Not now,

as once, in pain and toil and mortal anguish, must the blessed Redeemer throw His life away to purchase life for His unworthy brothers. All that which had to be done in weakness, on earth, by mortal endurance, in the strain of a sin-bearing agony, has been done—done by His love. What remains is an easier task. The conquering, uplifted Christ, regnant in celestial bliss, with matchless resources at command, and His omnipotent breath penetrating His Church—will not withdraw His hand from the easy completion of an undertaking the first half of which has been already performed in tears and blood. "Reconciled by His death, much more shall we be saved by His life!"

Only seize the religious meaning of the death of Jesus Christ as developed by St. Paul in these wonderful verses, and everything puts on a new face. It did so to St. Paul. This world had become a new world to him since Jesus Christ had died. Before that decease was accomplished at Jerusalem, the human race lay sunk in hopeless guilt, held in bonds by the inexpiable vengeance of heaven, with the blackness of death shrouding its hereafter. There was war betwixt earth and heaven. The solitary, damning fact of sin severed man from his Maker. God was justly displeased and hostile. In all this world reigned only gloom. Death stalked through and through among the homes of men, sole crowned king and lord of all. But now, what a change! God's attitude is changed. He is our judicial adversary no longer. Whereas there lay on our hearts the intolerable sense of His infinite disapproval and displeasure, now we have peace with Him. He is just, and yet He is able to justify us through the expiation of His Son.

This life, too, is changed. Its troubles press still upon us, but they no longer mean what they meant before. Before, they seemed to be presages of a vengeance to come; part of that war which God or fate was bent on

waging against human joy. Men took them for the vengeful or the spiteful stings of a Power that grudged happiness to mortals. Now, we are God's friends; and the afflictions which still come thick and fast into our days can be nothing worse than experiments upon our confidence in Him; a well-meant discipline bracing our hearts to a more manly faith and vindicating the sincerity of our attachment to Him, whom, though He slay us, we still can trust. When we have withstood such a test, we can even turn round and rejoice in it.

Last of all, the future is changed. The leaden pall is lifted which overhung man's existence. We are out of the pit now and its miry clay, with our feet upon a rock. There is laid open a pathway which will lead us right up and out into the light of paradise. With God on his side, a man learns to have boundless anticipations. Who will say that anything is too much to hope for a creature for whom God was willing to die? Sin is strong, and the bondage to it is a wretched thing. The flesh is weak, and the body vile, and it goes swiftly to decay. Creation groans in sympathy with groaning humanity, and of all men the Christian saint seems in this life to be the most miserable! What matters it? If God be for us, who can be against us? If God spared not His own Son, what will He not freely give? Here is the proof of His love! From that love of His which justified us by His own blood, who shall separate us now or for evermore? Salvation! Yes: from all that man needs to be saved from. From "sin," that we should no more obey it; from the "wages of sin" and the "body of this death;" from the "sufferings of this present time," and the bondage of corruption, and the travail-pains of creation, we shall be saved by the life of Him who died for us. We shall have His new, risen life, which is eternal life. We shall have quickened

bodies and freedom as of God's sons, and the image of the Firstborn. The very glory of God opens out to the vision of our hope.

Such a change wrought upon the whole spiritual horizon of man by the death of Christ—a change infinitely more striking and joyful than when day dawns upon dreary night and all things live again—explains the singularly triumphant tone of this paragraph. Again and again Paul uses words of boasting. "We boast in hope"—he says in the original—"we boast in tribulations"—above all and greatest of all, "we boast in God." The word in all these expressions is the same; and it denotes the proud joy which men feel, not so much over their own good fortune as over the nobleness or the honour of one who has made them glad. It is a wonderful thing for a man to be proud of God: to feel that his own blessedness and salvation are so mixed up with the glory of Him who saves and blesses that he can merge his personal satisfaction in a rapture of adoring confidence and worship. Yet this is what Christ's death enables the justified believer to do. Such a display of divine love—stooping to die for sinners and reconciling enemies at the price of blood—puts into the mouth of each reconciled enemy a marvellous hymn of praise. It is much to know that we are safe: it is more to have such a Saviour. It is much to reason, with a consoling and heavenly logic, that, "if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled by the Son's death, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." But it is even a greater thing to add, in a self-forgetting worship of generosity so divine: "Not only so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received such a reconciliation!"

CHAPTER XI.

A HISTORICAL PARALLEL.

"Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned:—for until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression, who is a figure of him that was to come. But not as the trespass, so also *is* the free gift. For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound unto the many. And not as through one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment came of one unto condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses unto justification. For if, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, even Jesus Christ. So then as through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous. And the law came in beside, that the trespass might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly: that, as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."—ROM. v. 12–21.

IT has already been seen how St. Paul in the previous portion of this chapter describes the immediate effects of our justification through faith in the atonement of Christ. That atonement, he has shown, profoundly altered for the better the attitude of God toward mankind. To believe in it is to enter into peace with God. Thus there has been opened up to faith a hope of ultimate deliverance from every form of evil.

In the rest of the chapter the Apostle is really continuing the same train of thought through a further stage. This blessed change which has been wrought upon the prospects of our race by Christ is now set in comparison or contrast with the doleful effects which resulted from the fall of Adam. By thus placing Christ as the ground of our justification over against Adam as the ground of our condemnation, and summarising the entire history of mankind under these two representative men, St. Paul at least vindicates the principle of his Gospel from the charge of novelty. The Gospel proceeds upon the same principle which had previously governed the divine dealings with our race. He does more: he brings into very powerful relief the world-wide influence of Christ's work as reversing for mankind—and more than reversing—all the ill which had been wrought by our original fall. Finally, he opens up afresh to our hope the splendid prospect, on which he has already dwelt, of results to be developed in the experience of believers out of this new Head of humanity.

It is noticeable, too, that not only does the Writer pursue the same theme, but he pursues it in the same key. The note of triumph which struck upon our ear in verses one to eleven, strikes us still in the remainder of the chapter. Nay, the very form of the Writer's logic remains the same. He has been arguing from the greater to the less, from the major thing which God has already done to the minor which He is all the more certain to do; and it is on *à fortiori* grounds that he still proceeds to reason in his parallel betwixt Adam and Christ.

The paragraph before us is so exactly knit into one that, to be understood at all, it needs to be read together. This may be the reason why, from our fragmentary fashion of taking up single "texts" many readers find it

hard to understand. Yet it is not really difficult to follow. It is moreover a singularly pregnant and valuable passage. Not only does it afford us nearly all the light which we possess on the ground of original sin and the operation or consequences of the fall; it opens up to theology the most extensive views of the divine dealings with our race. By grouping the destinies of mankind historically under its two heads—the first and the second—it has gathered up for us the whole theory of human ruin and human redemption under the widest synthesis of which Scripture gives us any suggestion. Without professing formally to expound the passage in detail, far less to work out the lines of speculation to which it gives rise, the design of this chapter (as of former ones) will be to offer such hints on the course of the Apostle's reasoning as may assist thoughtful readers to grasp for themselves the mind of the Spirit.

The argument is to turn entirely upon a parallel betwixt the effects of Adam's sin and those of Christ's righteousness. St. Paul is accordingly obliged to glance backward upon the actual results which followed the First Man's first transgression of law. He asserts that it was through that one man—nay, through one act of that one man—that sin and death can be historically proved to have entered our world and affected disastrously every other individual of our race. As this is the basis of fact on which his whole reasoning proceeds, it will be necessary, before we examine the use which he makes of it, to glance first at the event itself and at the proof for it which is here adduced.

His proof is itself a historical one. It rests on the undoubted fact that from the fall of Adam to the giving of the Law by Moses, "death," as he puts it, "was reigning

like a king" (ver. 14). The peculiar significance of this fact must have been very obvious to St. Paul's own mind; for at first he does not appear to have intended to explain it. It is only after he has launched upon an argument which assumes it and rests upon it (ver. 12), that it seems to occur to him how every reader may not see the matter in the same light as himself—not see it at least clearly enough to follow without further ado the steps of his reasoning. This explains why he abruptly halts, breaks off the sentence he had begun, and postpones his intended parallel betwixt our death through Adam and our life through Christ, in order to interpolate an explanation or proof from history of the singular effect which flowed from "Adam's first transgression." The fact to be proved (not assumed, as he had at first thought of doing) is this: Sin and death spread to all mankind through one man. The proof is this:—All men betwixt Adam's fall and the giving of the Law, millenniums after, died. Why did they die? Not, argues St. Paul, for any transgression of their own. For whose, then? For Adam's.

At first sight this argument is far from being so convincing to the reader as it evidently was to the Writer. During all these ages, one naturally objects, sin was in the world, just as it is in the world now. Why should they not have died for their own sin? True, is Paul's rejoinder; "previous to the giving of the Law there was sin in the world:" but he has already taught us to discriminate betwixt sin committed *against* a law and sin committed *without* a law. Without a law sin may be present as a defect of nature or fault of will—in short, as moral evil; but sin as a violation of statute can enter only where the statute which forbids it is known. To describe this particular species of sin—sin done in wilful breach of a known commandment—St. Paul employs a particular term. He

calls it "transgression;" and already in an earlier passage of this Epistle he has laid down the axiom that "where no law is, there can be no transgression" (iv. 15). This legal axiom he now supplements by a second, namely, that "sin is not imputed when there is no law" (v. 13). That is to say, transgression, or statutory crime, is the only description of sin which under the divine administration is charged against the doer of it as the ground of his condemnation. Sin done in the absence of any law to forbid it, or in blameless ignorance of any such law, is still sin, of course; it is moral evil. But by the first axiom "it is not transgression"—that is, statutory crime; and therefore, by the second axiom, "it is not imputed" or founded upon as a ground of condemnation in law.

Grant St. Paul his axioms and you cannot escape his conclusion. So far as the axioms themselves go, all that one can say is, that however consonant they may be, when stated, to the justice of a beneficent Ruler or the dictates of an enlightened jurisprudence, they are principles which no one could have ventured beforehand to affirm as underlying the moral administration of the Most High. We might have supposed, or we might have hoped, that the Divine Judge would show Himself lenient to faults of nature, committed in a state of involuntary ignorance; but we never could have laid this down with such certainty and universality as attach to St. Paul's statements. He speaks "as the oracles of God," by way of revelation, when he speaks thus. His words carry with them all the stronger assurance of truth, that they not only echo the gracious prayer of dying love: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," but are in entire accord with all that our Lord has taught us concerning Him who is perfect love.

Turning next to the bearing of these legal maxims upon the position of men "from Adam until Moses," one cannot fail to see that it applies to them roundly, yet with qualifications. To say that they sinned "without law," and therefore "not after the fashion of Adam's transgression" (ver. 14), is to say what is true in the main, but only partially true of some of them. St. Paul himself implies as much by the qualified form of his statement—"*even over them* that had not sinned" as Adam did. It is true that the ages before Moses, like the vast heathen world ever since, possessed no outward or written statute recognised to have come from heaven which denounced death as the penalty of transgression, such a statute as Adam is related to have had before them, or as the Jews had after them. Therefore men could not then break the statute with their eyes open in the same degree. Still they retained (as in his opening chapter St. Paul has already taught) the relics of natural conscience, testifying to the eternal rules of right and wrong, and testifying quite clearly enough to render some of them at least inexcusable. But in many of them even this natural conscience was wholly undeveloped, as it is in infants or in idiots; in many more it was a distorted faculty, giving false judgments; in all, it was defective, prescribing only certain rules of duty, and very feebly declaring, if it declared it at all, the penalty for disobedience. Besides, this inadequacy of the moral sense being a portion of that subjection of human nature to the consequences of transgression for which we are seeking to account, needs itself to be accounted for.

After all fair deductions, then, to the universality of Paul's statement have been allowed for, let the question be put broadly: Were the sins of our race committed in the ages without written or revealed law such that, *had*

there been no antecedent transgression, they would have been in the bulk of cases punishable with eternal death? I think St. Paul's reasoning compels us to reply that they were not. In other words, suppose it conceivable for a new-created moral agent to be left in such a condition of imperfect knowledge of God's will, and to sin, his fall would not entail such a penalty as actually followed upon the transgression of Adam. Here, then, were men dying for thousands of years under a penalty which was originally attached to the express violation of a known law, but not attached to such sins as they themselves could commit. Before Adam there had been placed a command with a precise warning of what should be the consequence of keeping or of breaking it. Deliberately breaking it, he died. But his posterity could not so sin. Before them no such positive law had been set. To them no such consequences had been foretold. They made no such deliberate choice with their eyes open. Many of them never acted with deliberation at all. Yet on all of them alike falls that same penalty, domineers over every one of them so soon as born. There is the fact. Is there any other explanation of it except St. Paul's? His explanation is, they died because Adam sinned. They died because the sentence passed on the First Man for his transgression included his posterity in its sweep, be their personal offences what they might.

This mode of treating a whole race as involved in the fate of its progenitor may involve difficulties from another side. But we are regarding it just now as given in the facts of human experience, or, if you will, as a theory to account for those facts. From this point of view it can scarcely be denied that it does supply an explanation for what must otherwise appear inexplicable. Moreover, if it be once admitted, it materially alters the complexion

of all the subsequent sins of mankind. Those later sins of the "men without law," might not be such "transgressions" as of themselves to entail "death." Yet it is impossible to cut them off from their guilty origin in the "one transgression" which went before. Sin is a heritage of man—no less than death. It cannot be treated as an original flaw in his constitution, or a lapse into which he has fallen unavoidably, through no fault of his own. If the race be one, and its whole sin be the fruit of a single culpable and deliberate act of original rebellion against law, then it is clear that the total mass of moral evil chargeable upon mankind must continue to be stained throughout with the dark hue of its origin.

It need hardly be added that in the case of adults who live under Christian civilisation, sin has to a great extent recovered the type of Adam's first transgression. The Law has long since been republished with plain-spoken promises and penalties. Most of us have chosen evil with the clearest knowledge of what is implied in such a choice. "Like Adam, we have transgressed the covenant." For this we are of course separately and entirely responsible. Still, even we, no less than the men from Adam to Moses, can be proved to underlie, in the first instance, the penalty, not of our own, but of Adam's sin. For we have not always possessed this full responsibility for our evil actions. Time was when we too, like them, had "no law." As children we knew nothing of sin or duty, of the Lawgiver or the penalty. Yet we sinned then; and we suffered then. Like our brethren we were subject then to death. Already the penalty lay upon all of us in our cradles, in a body of pain, a sickly life, a frequent peril of death. These things proved us to be under sentence, while as yet we had committed no sin worthy of death. So that we can still read in the diseases which wait around

the crib of what we call "innocence," in the tears which stain the opening infancy of man, and in the graves of little children, evidence such as satisfied St. Paul that it was "through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned" (ver. 12, R.V.).

It is time, however, to recall to recollection that all this is not preliminary merely, but parenthetic. The sweeping lapse of a race into death through the single act of a representative man is not St. Paul's main concern. He has brought it in by way of illustration. He designs to run a parallel betwixt it and the method of our justification through Christ. Now that it has been briefly proved to be a fact, he is prepared at the close of ver. 14 to resume his interrupted sentence begun in ver. 12. He does not resume it. He does not say: As God dealt with man in Adam bringing judgment and death through one man, so does He deal with us when through Christ's obedience we are made righteous. The reason why he leaves this an unfinished parallel is very notable. He has caught sight of differences betwixt the two cases which make the parallel in some points a contrast. The cases are similar, but not equal. They do correspond, yet not exactly. God's treatment of us in Christ answers certainly to His treatment of us in Adam, and is meant to make that other good; and yet it is not just coincident or conterminous with that. Is there any shortcoming? On the contrary, there is glorious excess. All that we lost in Adam is far more than made good in Christ. This is the contrast of which our eager Apostle catches a foresight, and at the sight forbears to conclude his parallel. Ere he has well let us know there is going to be a parallel at all, he takes fire at the surpassing excellence of grace over judgment,

of Christ over Adam; and abruptly exclaims (ver. 15): "But not as the trespass, so also is the free gift!"

In three particulars, according to St. Paul, does the application of this method of dealing with our race differ in the second instance of it, that of Christ, from the former instance of Adam. The development of these three points of difference, with a view to show how in each of them the advantage lies with the Gospel of grace, occupies the remainder of our section. A few words will be sufficient to exhibit, with adequate fulness, the argument of the Apostle on each of the three.

The *First Point of Superiority* is developed in ver. 15: "If by the trespass of the One, the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the One Man, Jesus Christ, abound unto the many."

This *à fortiori* argument treats, as I take it, of logical certainty, arising out of the inherent probability of the two cases. Here are two similar procedures on the part of God, by which a vast multitude of human beings is involved in each case in the fate of one man. The principle is identical in the two. It is the principle to which divines have given the name of "Covenant Representation," or of "Vicarious Obedience." It simply amounts to this, that one man may sustain such a relation of unity with many other men that he can justly act and suffer in their name or on their behalf, so that they shall be involved in the consequences of his conduct. This method of treating men may be intelligible to us, or it may not. It may appear fair to us, or it may not. We may find analogies to it in the ordinary experience of families and peoples, or we may find none. These matters are not here in question. As a fact we have these two examples of it, and no more, in the recorded dealings of the Almighty with our race as a whole; and so far as the underlying

principle of the thing goes, the one example is just as probable or improbable as the other. But now observe: the one application of the principle turns out to be a terrific disaster which overwhelms countless millions of unhappy beings in the judgment and ruin that overtake their transgressing representative. The other is a blessed provision of God's kindness brought in to remedy the sad efforts of the former, restoring a healthy condition of righteousness and moral life to millions of these lost people through the action of a better and abler Representative. Place these two over against one another, and say, apart from experience, which of them possesses the higher probability. Suppose such a mode of treating men to be barely possible, which of these two specimens of it should one rather expect to see realised? Need the answer be stated? Well now, the unlikely is a fact. Say what you please, the dark, improbable, mysterious scheme of representation which ruined mankind, involving us all in judgment and death, is a historical certainty. Granted that it is a very strange thing, very hard to credit and quite impossible to explain. Still it has happened; and that it did happen surely makes the splendid parallel all the more credible and certain.

I like this argument because it takes its stand on the darkest fact in man's experience, and, out of the very mystery and unlikelihood of that, flashes of a sudden, a welcome light. It bears upon us in two ways. First, is the reader one of those who feel the fact of universal condemnation for a single man's sin to be absolutely baffling and the next thing to incredible? Certainly it is staggering enough. No man who thinks will say that it is not an oppressive mystery. The humblest piety may own that it raises a cloud at least betwixt the soul and the clear radiant countenance of the Most Just and Merciful

One. If that be so, then learn the best use to be made of this hard fact. If anything can relieve this one inexplicable difficulty in the divine government, it must be when grace pledges itself to save on the same principle. Not that the mere repetition of a doubtful principle can make its abstract justice a whit more clear; only it is something to discover that it is a principle or rule in the divine administration of mankind, and not an isolated occurrence. There comes out (to say no more) a certain noble consistency in God's treatment of us, and a probability that His ways admit of being justified, when under a system of Restoration He is found to handle us precisely as He did under the original scheme of Probation. May one not even go a little further? There is in the system of grace the most appropriate counterpart you could ask for to the system of probation. When the very principle which on its first application in Adam worked disaster, turns its hand, so to say, in the Gospel, to work a remedy for its own ruin, is there not a certain poetical justice, or dramatic completeness, in the twofold scheme? May not the one be intended to be read in the light of the other? Is it not conceivable that, for aught we men of narrow vision can tell, both applications of the one rule to the Two Heads of Humanity may be requisite to make up that plan of Omniscience, of which each were but a broken part? At all events, one thing is plain. The more keenly any one feels the hardship of being involved without his will in the condemnation of another, the more loudly perchance he complains of that; with so much the more joyous eagerness ought he to embrace the parallel way of escape which has been brought nigh by the obedience of Another. Not daring to question that it was justice which presided over the world's fall, yet pondering the solemn shadow which that fall has cast over the ways of

God, it will be a wise man's part to hail with humble thankfulness that gain in Christ by which the shadow has been rolled away.

Again: are you one who stumbles, not at the fall in Adam, but at the doctrine of a free pardon in Christ apart from merits of your own? You dislike the Pauline teaching that a sinner may be instantly acquitted when many better men are condemned, if only he will entrust himself to the mediation of Christ His "Righteousness." Would you rather not be indebted so completely for your hope of heaven to the merits of Another? And have you never considered to whom you are indebted for your sin and condemnation? Surely, if you must take death at another man's hand, you may as well take life too! Is it not idle to quarrel with the way in which God would set us right, since it is in this very way that we have got wrong? One may spare oneself these gratuitous misgivings about justification through a Substitute's vicarious work. Folly to pretend a difficulty about this gnat, when I am compelled, whether I like it or not, to swallow down that camel! Rather let our trust fasten itself on God's excelling gift of grace; for certain as the fact is of death in Adam, the assurance of life in Christ is (if it were possible) still more certain. Thank God for this first "much more"!

A *Second Point of Superiority arises:* one of fact no less than of logic. "Not as through One that sinned, so is the gift; for the judgment came of One unto condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses unto justification" (ver. 16, R. V.).

In order to men's condemnation there needed but the one trespass of Adam. In order to our being declared righteous, there need "many trespasses" to be wiped out in blood. For we have made the redeeming work of

Jesus far heavier than Adam left it, "adding" our own "iniquity unto" his. It is perhaps a permissible supposition that the Restorer's work might have followed close on the fall, anticipating the age-long transgressions of mankind by an instantaneous purging of the "first transgression," and replacing of the lapsed race in recovered purity. There would in that event have been no room for the superiority which St. Paul seems here to have in his eye. But it pleased the Most High to suffer sin to make its way through the world, spreading with the spread of men and strengthening with their strength, till it had abused every prerogative of manhood, moulded after its will the civilisation of empires, ripened into gigantic heads of crime, and grown to be a burden intolerable to the earth. Nay, He actually gave a Law on purpose that sin might become "transgression," and that transgression might "abound." Then at length came the "free gift" of an atonement which covered all.

Not otherwise do we find it to happen on the narrow scale of individual experience. Is it not after a man has grown old enough to know right from wrong, and for years has abused his freedom to choose the wrong, adding to the inherited fault under which he is condemned a crowd of illegal acts of his own—"the least of them a death;" is it not then that, as a matter of fact, the "free gift which justifies" is usually revealed to the soul? Then when it comes to a mature and experienced offender, grown penitent at last, how widely must it abound! As if the original lapse of the First Father were a small thing to answer for, how does the righteous obedience of our New Representative spread over our own unnumbered sins, personal transgressions as wilful as Adam's, perchance as flagrant, not less than the crowd of unnoticed faults of custom or of disposition, till the whole long life of sin has been flooded and

penetrated with the cleansing—a free gift of righteousness that covers all, and where sin abounded, abounds yet more. Not so, therefore, as God imputed sin does He now impute obedience. Not so, but "much more;" after a richer, grander fashion, on an ampler scale. For the solitary transgression which Adam bequeathed to his children, how does our Second Adam impart to them that are His the obedience and satisfaction of a life-time; a royal "gift" of pure and stainless righteousness, atoning for every wrong, and covering all imperfection with the beauty of His holiness, who is "fairer than the sons of men"?

A *Third Point of Superiority* remains: "If by the trespass of the One, death reigned through the One, much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the One, even Jesus Christ" (ver. 17, R. V.). In other words, the results to be expected from redemption are grander than the results of the fall were disastrous.

This sounds fabulous; for the disaster entailed on mankind by the fall of "the One" might well appear too fearful ever to be overtopped by any subsequent advantage. That disaster Paul does not attempt to soften. It amounted to this, he says, that "death reigned." It not only "entered" and "passed through unto all," as ver. 12 has told us, but it assumed of right the lordly place on earth. It is man's king; a "strong one armed," who domineers by lawful right as one who wears a crown. A triple crown it wears; over body, soul, and spirit. And the "one offence" has given death this fearful sway, with power to have and to hold unto eternity. What monarch boasts so wide a realm, such imperial authority, such resistless power?

Over against this last extremity of ill wrought by the fall, what can Jesus bring us of outweighing or excelling

good? Why, merely to undo that curse calls for the abolishing of death. To discrown our tyrant—no more; and set them free who are all their lifetime subject to his bondage; is not this as much as man's highest hope dare look for? But superabounding grace conceives a higher triumph. The Deliverer does more than deliver. He turns a rescue into a conquest. He not only binds the strong one, He spoils him. The curse is reversed till it becomes a blessing. Having brought back life, Christ raises life to glory. Death is discrowned, but only to set a crown upon the head of the redeemed. Not "death reigns" any more, but we "reign in life." For He who comes to save unkings the king of terrors to make His people kings unto God. This is much more than ruin repaired or the fall undone. It is not mere life but regnant life which the Saviour brings in lieu of death. Life in closest union with His own, full, rich, and splendid, at the summit of glory, where He sitteth on His throne—the life of beatific and glorified kings, transcending thought or knowledge of ours; that the loss we endured in Adam may be overpaid in Christ, and the gift of grace may the more abound.

Thus at every point hath God resolved to be more than a Restorer or Repairer in His work of redemption; He will be a Gainer. He would not have a process so costly and arduous end where it began, in an idle circling round again to the old "Paradise regained." It circles, but spirally, mounting higher. God is a gainer: He receives back His own "with usury." Man is a gainer: we lost an earthly head to find a heavenly. Fallen from innocent probationhood in a perishable Eden on earth, to be the bondsmen of sin and death, our Second Adam is the Lord from heaven. Descending to our level that He may espouse our cause and share our loss, has He recovered us

from our fall? It is only that He might lift us higher than to the place we lost—higher, to His own assured and radiant Home of bliss in the everlasting security and measureless felicity of a spiritual life hid with Himself in the bosom of the Father.

"Not as the trespass," therefore, "so also is the free gift!"

CHAPTER XII.

FREE GRACE AND SIN.

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein? Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him by the likeness of His death, we shall be also by the likeness of His resurrection."—ROM. vi. 1–5.

IN the earlier chapters of this treatise, St. Paul was occupied in proving and defending the first fundamental truth of his gospel—that the only way in which we can be pardoned or acquitted in the judgment of God is through our trusting exclusively, not to what we have ourselves done, but to Christ and the atonement which He effected in our name. The immediate effects of this have since been traced in the fifth chapter. All believers in Jesus have now peace with God; they are reconciled to God; they enjoy His favour as a gratuitous gift. Nay, the more sin has abounded in men, or reigned over them before, so much the more superabundant and triumphant is that free favour of God, which through the propitiation of Christ has made even such sinners "righteous," to the praise of the glory of the divine grace!

To many this has always appeared to be very perilous teaching. It seems to offer no security for practical

virtue. Why (it is asked) should a man strive to act aright if his acceptance with God does not turn at all upon his own actions? Is not this to throw overboard the very strongest of all motives for good living—that is to say, the fear of penalty and the hope of reward? So far from teaching like this making men good, it appears to promise them immunity in their evil-doing,—if indeed it does not actually put a premium upon sin. For if you say God's grace is more conspicuous when it forgives many great sins than only a few little ones, what else is that but to say that we may sin the more in order to make God's forgiving mercy the more illustrious?

Of course, if anything approaching to this were a fair deduction from the doctrine of justification by faith alone, or should turn out to be its legitimate practical effect upon the believers of it, then such a doctrine would be grossly immoral. It would be pernicious in the highest degree and to every upright mind simply detestable. Grant the correctness of such an objection to evangelical teaching, and the opprobrium which has so frequently been cast upon it would be richly merited. But persons who feel shaken in their creed by such denunciations of evangelical teaching do well to reflect that precisely the same objection was taken in St. Paul's day against St. Paul's teaching; that he met it by a vigorous repudiation of it as in no sense a fair or real objection; that indeed his answer to it formed the second main branch or section of his theological system, since in that answer he developed the whole theory of Christian holiness. The mere fact that the unanimous doctrine of both the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches on the subject of justification has been assailed on precisely similar grounds to those on which Paul's doctrine of grace was assailed, certainly makes it so far probable that these Churches have rightly

understood his meaning. It is all the more probable, because, against any other doctrine but this evangelical one of gratuitous justification, no such objection can with any show of reason be alleged. At all events, the fact that even an apostle's way of putting the gospel did not escape such assaults, ought to make us sit rather easy under them now-a-days. To say the least, evangelical doctrine is not a whit less likely to be either apostolic or scriptural because men draw these evil conclusions from it. The charge of immoral tendency, which glanced harmlessly off St. Paul and the Church of his time, may very well prove equally harmless against the evangelical churches of modern date.

The truth is, that if the gospel of Christ—so far from encouraging or tolerating sin—do not prove itself to be in practice the death of sin, then it simply fails of its own avowed design; and, what is more, it proclaims itself a failure. Let it be remembered that the free acquittal of a penitent believing sinner on the ground of Christ's atonement is not the whole of the gospel. It is not the end even of the gospel: it is the means only by which it proposes to attain its end. Paul's definition of the gospel at the outset was this (i. 16): "The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation [salvation from sin and its effects, that is] to every one who believes it." And the very reason why it is God's power to deliver from sin was to Paul's mind just this, that in it is revealed God's way of free justification for sinners. Free justification is the *organon* or instrument by which God proposes to work on man for his liberation from sin. Now, if that free justification turn out on trial not to cure a man of his sin, but to encourage him in it; if, so far from fetching God's own power into the man to make him good, as it professes to do, it prove utterly weak against the might of bad

desire and bad habit, so that the believer lies still where he lay before in the pit of his own evil life, loving and doing what is selfish, sensual, or malignant—why then, all you can say is, this gospel turns out to be a cheat, like every other gospel or recipe for working deliverance in the earth which men have ever concocted or experimented with, before Christ and after Him!

The question, therefore, as to the practical influence upon conduct of evangelical faith is not at all a subordinate or unimportant one, even for the gospel itself. Quite the contrary. It is a vital question. It just means this: Is the gospel a success or a failure? Does it do what it attempts, or not? Has it any real divine strength in it, or none? Can it save, or can it not save? Only by its fruits does it seek to be judged. Only if it actually does what nothing else ever did—save men who receive it from the love and dominion of evil—has it made out its own claim to be a divine power in the world, a down-reaching into history and human experience of the beneficent spiritual energy of Almighty God.

Here, then, under cover of a reply to a plausible objection to the doctrine of justification, we really enter upon the discussion of the bearing of gospel faith on moral character. The (so-called) "doctrine of sanctification," or the way in which the gospel operates to renew man's fallen nature and restore it again to virtue, is the wide field opened up with the first verse of the sixth chapter, and traversed till the close of the eighth. These three chapters form the next chief section of this most theological of the Epistles.

To the objection, the plausible but hateful objection: "*What then? Are we to persist in our sin just in order*

that (as you say) the 'grace' of God may 'abound' in its forgiveness?" St. Paul's instant reply is a very blunt and staggering one. It amounts to this: Such an abuse of free grace is in the nature of things impossible. It is practically unthinkable and out of the question. For, says he, "*persons who like us died to sin—how shall we any longer live in it?*" Christians then are people who, in the mere fact of becoming Christians, "died to sin;" severed their old connection with it, that is, or passed through an experience which put a virtual end to their sinful life. This is what faith in Christ has done for everybody who has ever really believed in Him. After an experience like that, it is by the laws of human nature impossible—if it were possible, it would be morally shameful—for the man any longer to live wilfully in his old sins.

As an appeal to the instincts of the Christian life, this reply is quite sufficient. The objection, indeed, is one which never could occur to the regenerate or believing mind. It never could spring up inside the living Church; for it never could seem a possible thing to any one who had passed through the process of Christian conversion and been united to Christ by faith, that he was as free as ever, or freer than before, to sin! Such a difficulty is a purely intellectual one, arising in the minds of men who try to comprehend the gospel from the outside, without having first experienced it. To any real child of God, who will let his heart speak, it must be for ever certain that the change which his faith has wrought in him has given sin its death-blow, and made the wilful, conscious choice of sin over holiness a simple impossibility to him henceforth. But, then, when once an intellectual difficulty of this description has been started by a non-christian objector, it is no longer enough to appeal against it to the holy instincts of the renewed nature. For the Christian

has a head as well as a heart, and craves to find, for an intellectual objection, an intellectual answer. The objection, it is true, is not of his raising; yet, once raised, it cannot receive its full quietus till the Christian's understanding be so enlightened respecting the spiritual change which he has undergone, as to see how it must be for ever inconsistent with such an abuse of grace. That my Christian faith is inconsistent with persisting in sin, I feel. How it comes to be thus inconsistent with it, I want also to see for myself, if I can.

It is with this design, as I take it, that St. Paul proceeds. *Or*, he adds, if you do not see at once how this settles the objection, *are you ignorant of what every Christian is supposed to know—how as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus at all, were baptized into the death of Him?* Well, then, it follows that *we were buried along with Him* like dead men, *by means of that baptism of ours into His death, for the express purpose*, not that we should remain dead any more than He did, but *that, just as He was raised out from among the dead by the glorious power of His Father, so we also should walk thenceforth in a new life.*

The change (call it conversion or regeneration, or what you will) which is for every man the true starting-point of a conscious Christian life, consists, on the one side, in his turning penitently from his past sins, and on the other in his accepting the gratuitous favour of God for forgiveness through the blood of Jesus. In the case of a convert in the primitive Church, that change was always publicly attested, and its inward character symbolized, by the initiatory rite of baptism. For a man like Paul, who had marked the solemn and memorable revolution in his own life which happened at Damascus by submitting to the badge of the Nazarene faith; or for men like the Romans he was writing to, who, when they turned from

the gods of the Capitol and the license of a city whose dens sheltered the profligacy of the world, had equally marked their entrance upon a purer life by the laver of cleansing and second birth:—for them, I say, nothing could seem more natural than to look back upon their baptismal act whenever any question arose as to what their conversion to Christ really meant. The process of their conversion to Christ might sometimes have been a very gradual one. It had always been secret and spiritual. It had come about in various ways. It had involved changes, some of which were conspicuous still in their daily experience, while others cut deep into the mysterious relations of God with the human spirit. But whatever that immense moral and religious change implied, it had found in the case of each one of them the same public pregnant expression, and been solemnly ratified by the same divine rite. In the waters of baptism the conversion of one and all had been both "signified and sealed."

What then was the essential idea of that rite as respects their relation to sin? What light did it cast upon the question, Can a Christian continue in sin? Its most general meaning was this, that it put baptized believers into the closest possible relationship with Christ Jesus. It brought them into communion or participation with Christ. For it was a being "baptized into Him" (verse 3). It was a "putting on of Him" (Gal. iii. 27). It expressed their acceptance of Him, as in the fullest sense their new and second Adam,* their spiritual Head and Chief and Surety, of whose "body" they were thenceforward to be "members," whose fortunes they were thenceforward to share. Baptism is the seal of faith in Christ; so that if this be what baptism symbolically expresses,

* Cf. v. 12 ff. in its bearing on this new paragraph.

then this is what faith in Christ actually accomplishes. Yes; but if baptism seal our incorporation into the Representative Man from heaven, so that henceforth we are embraced in His actions, live or die as He lives or dies; who does not know that the special act of Jesus Christ with which of all others we are brought most prominently into participation, is nothing else than His death and burial? What is that central thing about Jesus Christ on which my faith as a penitent sinner has to fasten itself if I would have redemption and forgiveness? Why, His expiatory death upon the cross for sin. To me, a guilty sinner, God's Incarnate Son is before all other things "the Lamb who beareth the sin of the world." Am I to be justified through Him at all? Then it is "through faith in His *blood*" (iii. 25). Have I, an enemy, been "reconciled to God" by His Son at all? I was reconciled "by the *death* of His Son" (v. 10). To that death upon the cross of expiation which was attested by His three days' burial out of the sight of living men within Joseph's tomb—to that the gospel directs the sinner's eye, and on that builds his trust for pardon and peace with God. If I am united by my faith to the person of the Incarnate Son at all, so as to share in His work of righteous obedience and atonement, then it is before everything else to the dying Christ —the sin-expiating Victim—that my faith unites me. When I intrust myself and my sins to Jesus and see in Him these sins of mine taken away, it is on His cross that I recognize myself crucified in effect, my penalty borne, my guilt cancelled, my peace secured, and my pardon won! "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross!" And the great rite which certified the world and me that I am Christ's was before all else a baptism into the *death* of Him who died for me!

All this St. Paul treats as a Christian commonplace

which every Christian knows. Its bearing on our continuing in sin is sufficiently obvious. Conversion to God through faith in the propitiation of Christ is seen to be essentially a moral change, a dying to sin. If when we first believed we identified ourselves with Christ's sacrifice on the cross, accepting His death *for* sin and *to* sin as virtually our own, so that (as Paul puts it here) we grew into a kind of unity with Christ,* coalesced as it were, and became spiritually one with the Divine Man, who took our place, bore our sin, and was made a curse for us—then to all intents and purposes that was our death to sin. The nerve of the old separate, selfish, sinful life of each man was cut when the man abandoned (so to speak) his independent moral standing before God, merged himself in his new Representative, and gave up his personal sins to be judged, condemned, and expiated in his Atoner's cross. Realizing Christ to be simply his substitute through all that dying experience of His, the believer elects to be thus vicariously sentenced, crucified, and slain, that he may cease from the sin which he has learned to hate and dread, and be restored to the favour of God, which more than life he has learned to seek.

How can a man who has gone through an experience like that continue in sin? One who has come to see in the dying Son of God his own evil and guilty self judged and doomed, has entered into Christ's passion for sin as though it had been his own (as indeed in a sense it was), has felt the nails that tore Christ's palms enter his own soul to lacerate him with shame and regret, has willingly taken such a death to be the due reward of his own deeds, and so has lain down with His dead Victim and Substitute in the grave of the condemned—how can such a man, after that, persist in his sins? For him the old bad past is a

* σὺμφυτοι, ver. 5.

thing dead and buried. The old sins are expiated and abolished. The motives, pleasures, or gains of the antecedent ungodly life have had their fascination and their vitality destroyed for him. In his case, as in Christ's own case, such an experience has made an epoch. His rupture with the past is complete. The whole complexion of the future is changed. Old things are passed away, everything has become new. Such a man can no more go back to be what he was before, feel as he felt, or act as he used to act, than Jesus Christ could rise out of His grave to be once more the Victim for unexpiated guilt and the Sin-bearer for a guilty race.

When a sin-stricken and convicted man thus gives himself up to Christ, in order that by His death he may get rid of his sins to stand free and acquitted from them, it is not meant that he is to have thenceforth no moral life at all. Quite the reverse. God in Christ cancels the guilty past and slays the principle of sin within the heart, on very purpose that the man, set free from sin and death, may live henceforth an altered and a better life. In other words (to carry on the parallel with Christ), the Christian dies to his old sin so that he may begin to live to holiness and God. This is the express design which God had when He put our sins to death in His dear Son's cross. His object was to start us afresh upon a new career of virtue: to make it now (what it was not before) a possible thing for us to keep His holy and spiritual law. And He has made provision for our doing that, through the same inward tie which binds our heart to the Son of God. The nexus formed in the act of believing is not good for legal effects solely, but for vital issues as well. Faith in Christ makes us morally incorporate with Him in spirit, one with His spirit, as well as legally embraced under Him as our Representative. Christ is our Head in this sense

that He represents us before the law, so that in His death all who are His died to sin. Christ is no less our Head to quicken us as His members, and in His living again we all live anew. The will and the power to lead a new moral life are therefore guaranteed to us by our faith; for the whole energy of the Spirit of God, as it is possessed by Jesus Christ, is poured into the believing heart to carry it forward along a path of affectionate obedience to God—such obedience as befits a reconciled son of the Heavenly Father.

Thus far I have attempted little more than to paraphrase the peculiar and difficult language by which St. Paul, here as elsewhere, labours to express the connection of each believer to Christ. One thing is sufficiently manifest: Christian faith is very far from a superficial, or inoperative, or merely intellectual act, such as a man can do without his moral character being seriously affected by it. It is very much the opposite of that. It is connected with the deep roots of our moral and religious nature. It changes the main current of our ethical life. It brings about a radical revolution at the very springs of conduct. It wrenches us away by a fatal wrench from our old adhesions. It launches us on a totally fresh stream of vital influences. It is like a death and a birth in one: like a burial and a resurrection.

It becomes at this point an extremely interesting inquiry: Can we realize for ourselves, either out of our own or other people's experience, this extraordinary change which St. Paul appears to think his Roman correspondents will at once recognize as their own? Can we do anything to explain how it comes about? or how it stands related to the death and life of Jesus Christ? If we can, will this help us to understand how faith in Christ should bring about such astonishing results? Questions like these we

shall try to consider in another chapter. For the present they must stand over.

There is, however, another question started by this subject which never can afford to stand over with any of us. Those who have been baptized into Christ and say they trust in His death as the ground of their peace with God, are bound to satisfy themselves that their faith is of a sort to kill sin. It is true, we have had the benefit of Christian training, and may not remember any such period of change as stood out sharp in the recollection of Roman Christians. But the world at large is not yet Christian, and therefore the life we lead, if we are Christ's, ought to exhibit, if not on the surface, at least in its secret aims and spirit, a contrast to what prevails in society, somewhat like the contrast which the Roman Christians exhibited to their pagan countrymen. Above all, if our faith in Christ is gospel faith, it is certain that, so far from yielding to that perilous temptation which in theory the enemies of free grace ascribe to our evangelical creed (the temptation to sin because pardon is free), we must be abhorring any dalliance with acknowledged sin, contesting the sway even of habitual faults, aspiring after a more irreproachable virtue than satisfies society, pitching our standard as high as Christ's own example, and labouring to keep ourselves in every part pure for the service of Him who redeemed us with His most precious blood, that we might be "holy and blameless before Him in love!"

CHAPTER XIII.

ASSIMILATION THROUGH FAITH.

"For if we have become united with Him by the likeness of His death, we shall be also by the likeness of His resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin."—ROM. vi. 5, 6.

THE moral effect of a Christian's faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ is described in our Authorised Version of this passage by a peculiar expression:—"We have been planted together in the likeness of His death." I suspect there are few readers who attach to that phrase any very definite or intelligible sense. This precise expression occurs nowhere else in Scripture, though the thought itself occurs often. It is an effort to convey by a curious and vigorous figure the close spiritual assimilation which faith produces between the Christian and the Christ whom he believes in. In fact, the central thought in these words is very much what we express in modern English by "assimilation." Hence the revisers have substituted for it the phrase, "*We have become united with Him.*" What St. Paul says is literally this, that believers have "*grown together into one*" with Christ, so as to become of like nature with Him in the matter of His death. I conceive the matter so: We were once quite apart and separate from the Divine Man who died for the world's sin; and when we were so, there was nothing about us which offered the least analogy to His death. But we have come

now to be as it were incorporate with Him, our nature clinging to and growing into His, so as to take on a close moral resemblance, till you may say that the death of Him has been in some spiritual fashion copied or reproduced upon ourselves. When a penitent sinner puts saving faith in that great death of the Son of God by which his sins were atoned for, he becomes so closely one with Him that he may be said in a sense to die too. A change passes upon his own moral and religious nature which finds its nearest parallel in the death of Christ Himself.

But how can any inward change passing in the mind of a man to-day be said to bear a likeness to that which happened when once for all Christ bare our sin in His own body on the tree? Easily enough. Consider the moral significance of Christ's death for sin. Was it not, to begin with, the first full recognition ever made on this earth of the turpitude and guilt of human sin, and of the absolute integrity of the law which judged and slew the sinner? What nothing else had been able to do, God did by sending His own Son in flesh—He condemned sin in the flesh. The Son, being of one mind with the Father, owned that human sin was surpassingly hateful, and the divine law perfectly holy, and its sentence of death utterly just. All that He practically owned when He bowed His head to the Father's decree and died, the Righteous for the unrighteous. Now, whenever I do with my whole heart accept of that sacrificial death of Jesus as reconciling me to God by satisfying His law on my behalf, do I not take precisely the same view of my own guilt which Christ took? Do I not enter into sympathy with God's point of view, just as His own Son did—owning my sin to be inexcusable and abominable in His eyes, and this to be my desert, death and banishment from the Holy One? Can we call such an experience as this anything else but

growing spiritually incorporate with the likeness of Christ's death? The man who has got such a view of the criminality of his own sin that he is prepared to accept the sentence of the divine law, and submit to it as Jesus submitted, does in a very real sense die in his heart to sin. The fascination of sin—its spell over his will—is clearly broken. He has learned to loathe what he liked before. He has cut himself off from all his bad past, and buried his former life, as it were, in the grave where his Saviour lay.

Let us stand in thought beside the cold pale corpse of Him Who died for us, as it lay once in the arms of them that loved Him best, whose kisses, whose hot tears awoke no tender answer as they had been wont to do. This lovely Victim is the Lord from heaven, the only begotten Son by whom the worlds were framed. He has died for our sins; He has died in our room. Can we let that thought into our heart, and embrace in it the saving mercy of God, without feeling sinful desire wither down within us? Can we accept this for God's true verdict on our evil life, His sad righteous answer to our disobedience, and not wish to be disobedient and evil no more? Will a man's love for selfish indulgence survive if he hold this dead Christ within his arms? Can it come forth again alive after he has lain down in the grave with Him? Seek to know the fellowship of His sufferings; become conformed to His death; then the old evil, unlovely, ungodly self must die within the bosom, killed by the cross which killed our Saviour—crucified with Christ!

If faith in the cross of Christ prove thus effectual to cut the nerve of a sinful life, will faith in the living Christ do less to create a better life in us? If (as St. Paul says) we have become inwardly "grown together with Christ," so that we have experienced a moral death to sin analogous

to His own, surely we shall also "grow together with Him in the likeness of His resurrection." The very object for which Christ died once and our old sinful self has now received its mortal wound by His Cross, is this—that the believer, set free from the fascination of sin, should be point by point assimilated or conformed to the moral likeness of the perfected Jesus the risen Son of God. This side also of our spiritual renewal, this reconstruction of character after the divine image, is effected (precisely as our death to sin was effected) by faith in Jesus Christ.

It may appear to some as though this thing which we call faith were much too feeble or too uncertain an instrument to work so great a moral reformation. What! may one say, shall a man who in the very marrow of his bones loves to do wrong, who thirsts after sinful indulgence like a passion, whose self-will is as the breath of his nostrils to him, reverse his tastes, break his habits, deny himself delight, and change his life into the likeness of One so unlike him as Jesus Christ, merely because you tell us he puts faith in Christ to save him? What is there in this "*faith*" to work so astounding a revolution?

The answer to that, in part at least, is this: that among the elements of human character we have really no deeper or more powerful agent for working any such change than this same faith, if we understand it fairly. The word covers the most entire devotion of heart and will which a man can repose in any person whom he justly regards as wiser, nobler, stronger, and more trustworthy than himself. It means, if you will, what among men is called hero-worship; and there is no force known to the student of human nature or of history which has proved itself capable of altering the lives of men so profoundly as this. It combines the strongest motives and the most sustaining elements in character; such as confidence, loyalty, affec-

tion, reverence, authority, and moral attractiveness. You constantly find that large bodies of men, parties in the State, armies in the field, schools of opinion, whole nations even at critical moments, are swayed simply by the transcendent influence of one outstanding trusted leader. Still more absorbing is the influence which an individual may acquire over one other soul that entirely believes in him. Take a single element, not at all the noblest, in this complex relationship which we term "faith." Take the mere persuasion of one man that another is able and willing to aid him in his enterprises. Let it be a fixed idea, say, with a poor and rather resourceless individual that some influential friend will back him up in his business, and that in such backing lies his best chance of success. What is there such a dependant will not do at the instance of his patron? What change will he not make in his plans rather than forfeit substantial assistance from that quarter on which all his hopes are built? This is faith of a sort; surely it works powerfully. Add to such a selfish expectation of help the far deeper bond of personal reverence or of proud admiring love. Let the relation of the weaker to the stronger become more endearing and binding, like that of some tried and faithful lieutenant to the gallant leader whom he has learnt to follow with self-forgetting devotion through battle and storm; or like that of a maiden to the strong, wise, capable lover whom she both believes in and doats upon. Can bounds be set to the power of faith like theirs? Is there any limit to the influence it may wield over the course of the soldier's or the girl's life? Let the object of such devotion be really noble and wise: who shall say how far baseness may be burnt out of the heart that cleaves through good and evil to the idol it has chosen for itself? Let that idol be itself erring or misguided: who will wonder if the soul that

worships it be dragged down the same devious and unhappy path to share the same fall! If to all this implicit confidence and hero-worshipping loyalty of affection you could add in a rare instance some overwhelming obligation of a strictly moral kind, like a bond of gratitude deep as life for a benefit never to be forgotten, or a claim of supreme authority no less sacred than a father's, more subduing than a king's—who does not see that in such a faith as that, blending every force which can enable one greater person to rule or mould an inferior, you would have, not a puny instrument for toning and renovating character, but, on the contrary, the very mightiest of all forces within human experience?

This is our faith in Christ—*this*, but beyond analogy greater and more masterful, because such parallels as these are infinitely too weak to express it. The Christian trusts in Jesus for help and success in life, in the very highest sense, with a view to the attainment of every righteous end he seeks for, here or hereafter. But not as a man trusts in his fellow's support; for our Saviour is the mighty God who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. The Christian is tied to Jesus with a heart devotion based on reverence and warming into love; but not as women cling to their lovers, or partisans to their hero chieftain; for our Saviour commands a reverence which is worship, and wins an affection which is supreme. The Christian owes to Jesus obedience for the service He has rendered, and for the right He possesses to command; but not under such limitations as always environ human authorities, even the highest, since our Saviour is Lord of the conscience as well as of the heart, and His moral mastery is absolute, as His judgment shall be final. Let faith in Christ then mean (as it *does* mean) the practical recognition of Him as Supreme in all these relationships

put together, and the fastening upon His single person of all those mighty affections which bind one soul to another —does it seem any longer a thing futile or unreasonable to say, that through such faith as that a man may come to grow together into one with the Divine Object of his devotion, until the man's life is penetrated with Christ's spirit and conformed in everything to His matchless likeness?

I hope these earthly parallels to which I have ventured to allude may prove to be of some use. They serve at least to show that what we term "faith" is by no means a shallow assent to the articles of a creed, or a mental conviction that certain historical and theological propositions are true, but is strictly a personal bond between the soul and Jesus, which must be strong and rule our life if any tie can be strong enough to rule us. They show that when God says it is by faith a sinner is to be practically saved, made holy, that is to say, as well as forgiven, He does not choose for so arduous a work the weakest, but the very strongest and most fit faculty in human nature. Still, when I reflect how unlike is the faith which a Christian puts in Christ to any faith which we dare repose in one another, I feel as if the specialities of this case made it, I do not say irreverent, but idle, to bring it into such parallel with earthly instances. The tie which links a believer to his Saviour may present points of comparison with these lower attachments of the flesh, but it surely offers points of contrast quite as striking. Men do get assimilated no doubt to the objects of their earthly devotion; they do grow into their likeness. Still no union wrought by any such faith on earth can adequately represent the unique life-junction which, through a special act of God's Holy Spirit, makes these twain one—the living Head of God's new family and each lowly, trusting sinner who cleaves to Jesus.

For one thing, the union of a believing soul to Jesus, although realized no doubt in this act of conscious faith, nevertheless has its roots in a certain mysterious oneness which God's gracious will has established, behind our ken, between the heirs of salvation and their new representative and Second Adam, the Lord from heaven.

For another thing, the relationship into which he enters with Jesus who believes in Him, involves not a portion only of the man's experience, not some transient or secular or subordinate interest, but it involves the believer's very self—his true and deepest being. It is the *old man* which is crucified with Christ, that moral personality which has hitherto been the very centre and source of all my words and actions. That I now adjudge to have been an immoral ungodly self; that therefore I now abandon to be doomed and slain vicariously but effectually in my true Head upon the cross. That, with all its perverted appetencies, its false independence, its repugnance to God's will, its inborn corruption, I abjure and renounce. I am willing to have it slain, in order that the moral life which I am henceforth to lead may be the life of Christ dwelling in me and working through me. So that the renunciation involved in this religious act of faith is vastly more thoroughgoing or radical than any other which men ever make. It binds the believer to the object of his faith with a more central bond than any other. His very self hangs thenceforward on Christ's self. He owns himself powerless for any moral good apart from the Divine Source of power to which he has attached himself. His spiritual being is new made; for it is informed by another Spirit as its inspiring and ruling influence, even by the Holy Spirit whom Jesus gives.

Such a change as this, being not a change merely in a man's conduct, or in the mode in which his character

manifests itself, but one deep enough to reverse the springs of character and form anew the spiritual attachments of the person himself, is reasonably enough ascribed to a special divine agency. It is effected, indeed, by faith: that is, so far as our consciousness of it goes. It is only by our putting faith in Him that we know ourselves to be really attached to our new Head and Centre. But such faith, and such attachment, come of the operation of God. When the old man dies and a new man lives in a human being there is an evident re-birth; and for that we must postulate an immediate operation of the Divine Giver of life.

These then are peculiarities about this unique example of faith—the faith that saves. And these peculiarities lift such faith, in respect of its transforming, ennobling power, far above comparison with the faith of an army in its chief, or of a child in his parent, or of a wife in her husband. When one's trust in the Saviour involves the dearest interests of the immortal and spiritual life, above all, when it puts one into direct contact with God and fetches down into the dead bad heart a special energy from above, who need wonder that "all things are possible to him that believeth"?

CHAPTER XIV.

CHRIST'S DEATH TO SIN.

"For he that hath died is justified from sin. But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death no more hath dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died unto sin once: but the life that He liveth, He liveth unto God."—ROM. vi. 7–10.

THE interest of Christ's death and resurrection lies for us not merely in the unparalleled marvellousness and solemnity of that dual fact, but even more in its relation to our personal history. Throughout this passage of his letter (as we have already seen in last chapter) St. Paul binds up the dying and living again of Jesus with the Christian's in such an intimate fashion that the moral results of them are extended to us. In His dying we are dead: in His new life we live. As a matter, therefore, of practical experience, it concerns us to understand, if we can, the unusual and somewhat strained expressions by which the Apostle labours in this passage to bring out more fully than he has yet done the inner meaning and bearings of the Lord's death and life.

First, then, let us seek to understand what is said of the Lord's death. We arrive most easily at what the writer intends by his phrase, "He died unto sin," * if we

* I take the *τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ἀπέθανεν* in the wider sense as the Dative of Reference; as is done by the best modern expositors, such as Meyer, Von Hofmann, Tholuck, Philippi, and Alford.

start from a familiar form of speech in daily use. Nothing connected with death is more impressive than the sudden and total stop which it puts to the relationships of foregoing life. Of him who died only an hour ago, we can say that already he is done with this world. Whatever interest he possessed in it is at an end. The ties which bound him to it are cut. From every obligation which it imposed on him he is discharged. Yesterday the man formed a busy unit in the complicated system of interacting forces which we name Society, entangled by a thousand threads of family and trade and public life with the affairs of other men, owning rights and owing duties. In the thick of it all, how has one swift scythe-sweep cut him clear! You are alone in the darkened room with the man who was so active and needful, around whom a myriad interests clustered; but what has that passionless face upon the bier to do any more with the warm world which breathes and whirls outside the chamber window? Neither love, nor hate, nor desire, nor care, comes here to move him more. His world is elsewhere; his life is far away. Condense into one most forcible word this utter change in a man's relations to everything which formerly affected him: what better can you say than this—"He is dead to this world"?

When we apply this definition of the phrase to the case of Jesus, and inquire what is meant by affirming of Him, "The death that He died, He died unto sin"* two questions emerge. 1. What connection had Jesus with sin before His death? 2. How came His dying to sever that connection?

1. As to the former: The connection of the Lord Jesus with sin so long as He lived an earthly life was the most complete which it is possible for a sinless person to have.

* ver. 10, R. V.

"He knew no sin" by that sad experimental knowledge which implies its entrance within the soul to stain and wreck it. When you have named this single exception—a splendid one certainly—to the completeness of His connection with sin, you have named all. What else have we to do with it which He had not? Ours, not His, is the doing of sin with the will's consent; whatever follows on the doing of it was His as well as ours. In other words, the legal investiture of His person with the responsibility attaching to sin was so complete that throughout His entire life we see the earthly fruits and pains consequent upon wrong-doing fall upon Him with their full force. For example, in the constitution of His body, born with the same frailty and exposure to pain and ill as we all share; in the curse of sweat for daily bread, while He wrought at the bench; in the endurance of fatigue and want, when worn down to an early grave through drudgery by day and vigils by night, through the anxiety and the grief that sap the strength of men. His soul shared the same curse: for, if it is sin which breathes suspicion for love into human hearts, turning the honey of confident affection into gall, He surely had His share of distrust, unkindness, misconstruction, treachery. If fear of death be born of sin—that vague foreboding, I mean, which like a night-dream haunts the souls of mortal men—may we not compare with that the mysterious uncertain gloom which plainly deepened over the Christ as His brief career drew towards its end? Nor was sin's power exerted only over soul and body. The awful experience of forsakenness on the cross gives a hint of deeps of spiritual distress which we are unable to sound. They probably find their nearest analogue in the horror which some spiritual natures have betrayed, when the divine sentence against sin—the sentence of separation from the God of love—appeared to

be actually executing itself before its time, and a thick darkness blotted out from the heavens overhead the face of an offended Father. Who will venture to say that St. Paul's terrible phrase, "made a curse," is too strong to express the hold which sin's penalty laid upon our Victim, or that the whole of our Lord's stainless humanity was not wrapt around and penetrated through and through by the tremendous retributive force of sin? Connection with sin! He was all Sin's own; its prey, surrendered for some divine necessity to the Devourer; the choicest portion ever seized upon to be borne down to the keeping of Sin's child, Death, within Sin's home, the grave.

2. The whole of this connection with sin is said to have terminated at death. It has not been so with any other man. Other men spend their earthly existence under the same penal conditions as I have described in His case; but what room have we to suppose that the act of dying has proved to be in any other case the end of sin—unless it were through their connection with Him? Men who stand on the verge of the unseen world have no reason to look forward to the act of dying as an escape either from the sinful habits which they have contracted in this life, or from the judgment of heaven upon their misdeeds done in the body. So far from that, the instinctive voice of conscience confirms the declaration of Holy Writ that "after death comes the judgment." Nor is there the slightest ground for supposing that death can operate as a purifier, restoring lost natures to innocence and virtue. It is far more rational to apprehend that the human spirit, when set free from the restraints of the present state, and flung loose in all its abused but magnificent strength to do what it pleases without rein, may indulge in the spiritual sins of pride, hatred, and defiance of God on a scale rarely if ever beheld on earth.

But what no other man's death can be expected to do was done by the death of Jesus the sinless. That is to say, it closed His connection with sin, for this simple reason that in His case alone that connection had been outward, not inward; a guiltless submission to sin's penalty, not a guilty surrender to sin's power. From first to last the sin which is in our race remained to Him a foreign foe, that could gain no entrance into the citadel of His will to corrupt or master His spiritual nature; and the connection which He sustained with it was merely that of a sufferer who owes a death to justice for imputed sins of other men. Once that death was paid, and all the suffering endured which filled up the "cup" put into His hand to be drunk, His connection with imputed sin was of necessity dissolved. "The death which He died was a death unto sin—once for all."

From this aspect of the facts, how plainly does it appear that the peculiar character of our Lord's passion, and its peculiar virtue as an expiation for guilt, turned entirely upon His personal sinlessness! As a sufferer He stands alone in this, that He is the sole instance known to us of guiltless and voluntary and meritorious suffering. "Numbered among transgressors," so as freely to embrace their legal position and hold His life for theirs as forfeit to the law: yet "separate from sinners," so that over His pure and holy nature sin never won that moral mastery which survives legal death and renders spiritual death eternal. Till this unique position of the Son of Man amongst men is distinctly perceived, it is impossible to understand how death, the law's supreme penalty, could do in His person what it does in no other: terminate the law's claim and set Him free from the power of evil, so that in dying He should die for ever unto sin. Having thus "suffered in the

flesh," He "ceased from sin." "Death no more hath dominion over Him."

This brings us face to face with the second fact in St. Paul's statement. From such a death as this there could issue only *life*—a life unto God.

Let it be observed, in the first place, that Jesus having ceased to be under the power of the world's sin, in any sense, could not but live anew. For to "die unto sin" must mean to die unto death—to be done with it. It is the law's sentence against sin which places on Death's head an iron crown and keeps it there. When the law's sentence has been endured, and the power of sin as guilt has been exhausted, the royalty of Death is over. He who in dying is become free from sin and its effects, must be free from death; since death is for man the chief effect of sin. In dying, therefore, Jesus was done with death. He dies no more. He lives. So absolutely certain because grounded in a spiritual necessity is that great word which St. Peter spoke to the Jews when he declared it was "not possible" that Jesus should be holden of death.*

More than that: The life which emerges when sin and death have been died to, is a life "unto God." The form of this remarkable expression is evidently determined by the contrast which St. Paul intends to mark with the preceding clause. "Life unto God" is meant to constitute an antithesis to that antecedent life unto sin which in dying was brought to a close. The new state of Christ's human existence is to be the negation of the old—its clear contrary. It is more: it is its counterpart. It is nothing which the old life was, as a life unto sin; it is everything which the former was not.

Having seen above how the earthly condition of Jesus

* Acts ii. 24.

involved a close contact with sin, so that He was burdened by it in soul, body, and spirit, we can readily trace the contrast which His risen life has to offer. Let the reader glance through these sin-affected details of His earthly existence, and work out the comparison for himself. Over against that body, alive to sin and consequently heir to infirmity, mortality, and pain, over against its exposure to waste and want and weariness, its mean necessities, its honourless condition when men tore it and marred it with shameful violence and insult, must be set a godlike organ for divine life to inhabit, fashioned within that strange workshop—the grave, and now found fit to move amid celestial scenes with unfatigued strength, and to be the centre in its unwithering beauty of celestial homage as it sits upon the throne of God. O grave in Joseph's garden, where is thy victory! To this changed constitution of His body falls to be added a corresponding change also in Christ's manner of life. Think of our family homes, vexed as they are by passion, limited to a spot of earth and a few years of time—homes whose doors open daily to unwelcome visitors like sickness and anxiety, open now and then to let loved inmates depart never to return. In such a home as these lay the appropriate scene for His narrow and chequered experience so long as He was alive unto sin. There, like any of us, it was meet that He too should toil and struggle and grieve. But now that He liveth unto God, it is in a home which no ungodlike thing can enter. Lifted in the surroundings of His life far above the reach of sorrow, reproach, vexation, or wrong, above these checked and straitened ways of mortals, He inhabits now the cloudless, passionless dwelling-place of God, and drinks for ever the fulness of bliss that issues from waveless depths in God the Fountain. Within such a divine home, safe and remote from evil, had dwelt the Everlasting Son before the

days began when He lived unto sin. To it He has now borne back from earth a human nature which, living here below, lived unto sin, and dying, died unto it, but now that it liveth again, liveth for ever unto God.

It is the note or mark of this transfigured life that it is "unto God." That is to say, God takes the place in reference to His new manner of living which sin formerly held, and the curse for sin. A blessed exchange! What a sweet surprise to close one's eyes upon a world where every hour had been weighted with all that sin entails of vanity and bitterness, to awake within the arms of God, in the security and tender cherishing of an embrace that shuts in all bliss for evermore! Life hid in God, where no foe can reach it; spent with God, where no sorrow dims it. Memories of the years through which He lived unto sin in Galilee and Judæa, memories of heart-ache and fear, of dark passages of temptation and the near neighbourhood of the Evil One, of the fight of faith, and of passion unto death—these will linger, will they not, about the thoughts of our dear King? They may be the song of saints and the wonder of the angels while eternity grows old. But it will be as a far-off fearful tale of days that come again no more. Around this tale affection will twine, and gratitude will sing the song that is ever new. But methinks, long after the end of all things earthly shall have been left in the dim past, it will not be without a flush of warmer security that the joyous immortals will recall how this blessed life of Him in Whom they live grew up out of the very grave of death, murmuring the one to the other, "The death that He died, He died unto sin once; but the life that He liveth, He liveth unto God."

CHAPTER XV.

OF REALISING THE IDEAL.

"Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey the lusts thereof: neither present your members unto sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves unto God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under law, but under grace."—ROM. vi. 11-14.

IT is the young who are sanguine and live among ideals. To most people the experience which life brings is an experience of disillusion. Ideals which are never realised have, notwithstanding, a valuable place in the formation of character. Although no man walks the earth so brave and noble, nor any woman half so fair, as the hero and the heroine of our boyish dream, yet one's whole life would have been the poorer had the dream not been dreamt. A large part of the education which develops any generous or gentle nature, consists in evoking a lofty conception of what befits it, of what it ought to be in order to be worthy of itself. A well-bred man may fall at times far beneath his own conception of a gentleman. Still, that conception, cherished, reverenced, and aimed at, is after all what makes a gentleman of him. No wise man, therefore, will mock at aspirations after perfection; since it is certain that such excellence as is attained in this world comes by striving after the unattainable, a striving which fails indeed, yet does not wholly fail.

I am naturally led to these trite remarks because they fall in with the scope of the Apostle's exhortation in the passage before us. What is true of life in general is still more true of the Christian life. St. Paul is here holding up before his Roman correspondents the Christian ideal. He is rousing them to aim at realising it, although its complete realisation be for the present out of their reach. But he goes a step further than other educators venture to do; for he encourages them with the assurance that their ideal is certain one day to be realised.

I. What then is the theory of the Christian's condition? As just explained by the Apostle, it is this: The Christian is a man who, like his Master, is already dead to all sin and alive only toward God. He has ceased, in other words, to have anything further to do with sin. With God he has everything to do. This has resulted as a matter of course from the close union, or, as it were, incorporation, which his faith has effected betwixt him and Jesus Christ.

The experience through which Jesus Himself passed while He was on earth has just before been described as a "dying to sin." We have seen in the last chapter how the relations with human sin into which He freely entered along with us were of such a character that He could only get rid of them through death. He was "made under the Law," "made sin," "reckoned among transgressors." By these and the like expressions, Scripture makes it clear that in some way which, however mysterious, was yet most real, Christ took upon Himself a partnership in other men's sad heritage of condemnation and mortality. From the strong detaining hand which the world's sin thus laid upon Him, He found no way to escape but by dying outright. That was escape. When a man has died, says

St. Paul (in verse 7), he is justified from sin. No criminal code on earth has any claims over the dead. Death is the convict's quittance. It is his discharge. Just so, the death of Jesus as His supreme act of homage to divine Law and His endurance of the utmost that justice could do to Him, was His conclusive discharge. By it He was "justified" from every claim which sin had acquired over Him as our representative. Thereafter, as we saw, He could not but rise to live a life in which our sin and curse had no more any part to play; a life which had thenceforth to do only with God and with the peace and brightness and felicity which are in God.

Through this entire experience it is ever to be recollected that the Lord Jesus passed simply as a Leader or Head, empowered to act in man's name and on man's behalf. Do I personally rely on that? Can I heartily as a penitent accept of His surrender of His life as the forfeiture which was due to myself for sins of my own, so that it is for me He has gone back justified to His Father's heaven? Then, in Paul's language, I grow together into one with Christ. By taking home to myself the experience of my Redeemer, I enter personally into sympathy with it. I come under the spiritual power of it. A parallel experience passes over my own moral being. I grow incorporate with His death and resurrection. The evil-loving, sinning self in me is slain and a new man born in me. After that it may be truly said that I likewise have "died to sin," but live now afresh to God and righteousness.

Here, then, is the ideal condition of the Christian believer. He is a man in Christ. In theory, he has henceforth just as little to do with sin in any shape as Jesus has in heaven; which lets us see a little how St. Paul can elsewhere employ such amazing language about mortal

men as this: "Risen with Christ;" "sitting with Christ in heaven;" their life "hid with Him in God." * Such is Christian life in its conception. Such therefore it must aim at becoming in fact.

It is no answer to this to say, as may truly be said, that there never was nor will be a single Christian on earth, not Paul himself, who fulfils such an ideal. The best of believers are the most ready to admit that they have far too much to do with sin. It tempts them, and they yield sometimes to the temptation. It infects them still, and nothing they can do quite escapes from the infection. When they commit evil, it stings and humiliates them. Christians err and blunder; they lust and they indulge lust. Christians confess all this, and burn with shame and grief for their daily faults, just as other men have to do. It is all too true. Still, this is no reason at all why the believer should not have his ideal, cherishing the splendid vision of what in essence Christ's man is bound to be. Nor is it any reason why he should not steadily contemplate that vision, as St. Paul bids him do, and "reckon" it to be, what it really is, his legitimate and proper condition. Paul would have Christian people fix this well in their hearts as a true description of the ideal Christian: "dead to sin, alive only to God;" a description, too, not drawn upon empty air, but actually existent in their risen Lord. He would have us get into the habit of looking up at His bright image, as exhibiting what we are to become; nay, as what in the purpose of God we truly are, although as yet the Divine Educator is far from having fully realised His conception.

II. It is obviously with a practical design that the writer bids the Christian cherish such a conception of his proper character.

* See Eph. ii. 5, 6; Col. iii. 1–3; and compare 2 Cor. v. 17.

All life strives to fulfil itself. It makes for that which it was made to be. In the moral training of character, as we have already been reminded, there is no better way of attaining an ideal than to be persuaded that it is the true ideal *for us*. Whenever a boy thinks himself old enough to be a man, he tries to grow manly. Remind an Englishman that he is one; you call up a style of behaviour to which he feels himself bound to conform. Rear a lad in the knowledge that he has been born to the purple; and he will either affect the airs, or claim the license, or discharge the functions, of princely rank. In one way or another, we all of us try to play the part which we have been led to regard as our own. On the same principle would St. Paul have the Christian reckon that, being a Christian, he is a person who has done with sin; since thus he lays a basis for the practical exhortation: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey the lusts thereof."

Put the matter in this form: You are a man supposed to be in idea dead to all sin. Yet in a given instance an evil desire has mastered you. Is there not betwixt these two facts an incongruity, not simply painful, but intolerable? They cannot possibly hang together. A contradiction in fact between your theoretical position and your actual conduct is not a state of matters in which you can rest. Either your ideal must be abandoned; or an effort must be made to shape your behaviour in compliance with it. But your ideal is what you dare not abandon; for that would be to abandon Christ. The conclusion becomes irresistible: let not this wrong desire lord it any longer in this fashion over you—a man dead to all sin!

Such an appeal to the believer's consciousness of his true position in Christ is equally valid, of course, whatever be the shape in which sin has overcome him. The evil

desires (or "lusts," as our version has it) which may arise in the heart are countless, for they range over the whole domain of experience. But the principle at the root of them all is the same. They agree in being opposed to the divine will. With that fondness for personification which distinguished him, Paul accordingly gathers up all wrong desires under this central principle of resistance to the divine will, calls that by the name of Sin, and goes on to speak of it as though it were a rival lord or sovereign over men—a kind of anti-god. Then each single desire after what God forbids is naturally conceived of as one of the commands of Sin, conflicting with a counter command of God. When you carry out that desire in action, you are, so to speak, obeying Sin. You are suffering it to reign over you as your master.

How can a Christian do that? It is true that our Lord Jesus said, in words which clearly underlie this figure of St. Paul, that "Every one who committeth sin is the bond-servant of sin." But has not that servitude been broken for a Christian by the death of Christ? How then can you call it broken, if, so often as you do wrong, you are practically owning Sin afresh for your over-lord? To do what God forbids because the Sin of your heart bids it: what else is this but to fight against the rule of God in order to restore Sin's broken and discarded empire? Each instance of this sort really does something towards re-establishing the sway of Sin; for it renders the strength of Sin within the man stronger by weakening his power of resistance. To act in this way is actually (as St. Paul works out his figure in verse 13) to lend oneself as a worker and fighter on the side of Sin. It is to misuse one's very organs, faculties and members as so many tools to work with or weapons to fight with—tools and weapons of unrighteousness. How glaring is this inconsistency!

To be one with Christ and have done with the sin He died to; yet employ the tongue to whisper malicious suspicions or gloze over a dishonest bargain, and the eyes to gaze with envious longing at the prosperity of one's neighbours, so that eyes and tongue, redeemed for God, are degraded into implements for restoring again the kingdom of falsehood and uncharitableness.

Life is full of similar inconsistencies. Yes; but the more plainly unchristian acts are confronted with the Christian ideal so as to expose their glaring inconsistency, the less likely are they to be repeated. We can do a great deal by trying, when it is God who worketh in us. When one's thoughts are occupied with the splendid perfection which St. Paul has sketched for us as the only life which it is proper for us as Christians to lead, then it is that one feels most keenly ashamed of one's actual worldliness, vanity, temper, meanness, quarrels, discontents. Then it is that, moved by shame and a holy ambition, one strives most earnestly to yield complete service to the will of God. Let the believer think, then, what he is, that he may become what he ought to be. Broken off from sin—let there be no feeble or furtive concession to it at any point. Live solely for the work of God. Let us spend ourselves wholly in His pure and beneficent service.

Is it still insisted on that all this is nothing but an ideal, beautiful, like other ideals, but no more to be attained than they? Life, as I said, is full of disillusions; and here is one of them. Enthusiastic persons without experience set out in youth's morning with eyes that glisten, because to them the world is clad in hues of promise, and the future, lovely as a dream but not more real, beckons onward their eager footsteps. Wait but a little while till the glamour is spent, and in the dull grey light of fact

the same man will be found plodding wearily forward with the dogged look upon his face of one whose blessedness it is to expect nothing. Does not that sum up for most of us our stock of experience? Will it be otherwise with a Christian's enthusiasm for a sinless life?

This it is which chills the ardour of many and paralyses their endeavours after holiness. The fear of this, too, withholds many more from entering with any seriousness on the Christian course. It is worth while to ask, Is there good ground to say that the believer's ideal must prove as unattainable as those of other men, or lead him in the end to a similar disappointment?

For one thing, it is not true that the genuine Christian, as he gets on in life and draws near its close, thinks less about his early ideal of perfect holiness, or believes in it less, or longs less ardently after its attainment than he did at first. This is purely a question of fact, which each reader will determine for himself, according to his observation of the lives of Christians. I can only give it as my own observation that in this respect a Christian believer is unlike other men: that so far from fading away before experience and the sober views which come with age, his romantic hope to be sinless as Christ Himself dwells more brightly before his soul, fascinates him more, and comes to be more devoutly believed in, in proportion as the sun of life declines to its earthly setting. Question an aged saint about certain golden dreams of his youth, dreams of fame or love, of doing great deeds or achieving large success. You will find that his boyhood's castle of hope has melted long ago into the thin air on which a nimble fancy painted it. But ask him whether the dream of his early ardour when faith was new, that one day he should grow like Jesus, sinless and perfect, has faded likewise. Ask if his long experience of failure has quenched

that too flattering illusion like the rest. You know little if you do not know what reply you will receive. Age, not youth, is the Christian's time for devout anticipation and the longing after complete holiness. What else draws out the yearning of his spirit, weaned from earth, yet not weary of it, towards the land which is nearer now than when he first believed? What kindles the dying eye but the persuasion that to put off the flesh is to be with Christ and to be like Him? Is not this the very blessedness which he expects in heaven that there the days of failure will be ended and the long-sought-for ideal attained at last? Explain it how you please, here at least is one vision which experience does not dim.

St. Paul has an explanation to offer, and it is a very simple one. The hope of Christians is actually to be attained. A life quite freed from bondage to evil desire and alive only to what is holy, he declares to be no devout imagination luring credulous enthusiasts on a bootless quest. Some of us indeed might say: Were it even unattainable, it would still be our highest wisdom to hope for it and to aim at it. Quench this ideal of the sinless life and you only fling back the hearts of men into moral despair. But the Gospel at all events is no decoy to virtue under false pretences. It does not bid us deny lusts which are never to be quite subdued, or wage a combat with Sin in which we are sure to be beaten, or covet a purity that is unattainable. Quite the contrary. It holds out the definite assurance that one day—not very remote—Sin shall cease to have any more dominion over the believer. Once set free from this evil world and bodily life of man, once rapt into the pure presence of the Eternal amid stainless comrades, where the flesh clogs the spirit no more, nor any unholy environment can longer oppress the will, it will be easy, it will be delightful, for the lover

of goodness to be good. The Christian will have attained at last to his ideal. He will be like Jesus Christ.

Nor is it at all difficult to understand how the Gospel is able to guarantee a consummation so devoutly to be wished. The simple explanation is that it has placed us under a regime, no longer of law, but of grace (verse 14). The law of duty can do no more than make known what we ought to do. It lends no help at all towards doing it. Now the prime disability under which our fallen nature lies is not ignorance, so much as disinclination. Our feeble desire to perform what is right is overborne by far stronger desires after what is wrong; and the will, seized by these tyrannous cravings of the flesh, is hurried along after forbidden indulgences. Against forces like these the publication of a law is useless, or worse. What is really wanted is gracious and prevailing help. To win over to the side of righteousness the strongest forces of the soul herself; to kill illicit desires by planting pure ones in their stead; to recover the man to a new and better mind, sustain his own efforts after goodness by the charm of a supreme affection, and pour into his nature the healing purifying tide of a divine life through the energy of God working in him: this is the cure for such an evil case as men are in. This remedy the Gospel fetches near to us in our need; and the key word of the whole curative system into which it has introduced us is—Grace.

CHAPTER XVI.

BONDMEN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

"What then? shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye presented your members as servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now present your members as servants to righteousness unto sanctification. For when ye were servants of sin, ye were free in regard of righteousness. What fruit then had ye at that time in the things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life. For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."—ROM. vi. 15–23.

ST. PAUL'S manner of thinking is frequently hard to follow. One peculiarity which contributes to make it a difficult exercise to track his reasoning is this: On the threshold of a fresh train of ideas, when the subject which fills his mind has been no more than started, it is not uncommon to find him suddenly break off in order to interject some side thought which has just occurred to him. His eager intellect has not the patience to pursue his main argument. He must first turn aside to hunt down the dependent idea which has caught his eye.

Of this habit of his we have an instance before us. In the current of his discussion he has reached this point at

the fourteenth verse of the sixth chapter. He is about to explain how the position of a believer as not under the Law but under grace as a condition of his salvation secures for him the attainment of holiness. The phrase he has just used, "not under the Law, but under grace," calls for further exposition. It is one of those pregnant contrasts which in a pair of terms sum up whole chapters of theology and of religious experience. It is about therefore to be made the starting-point or text for a prolonged discussion. Such a discussion actually follows in the seventh chapter and part of the eighth. But before this rapid thinker can permit himself to enter on the train of thought which is opening before him, an objection starts across his path like an apparition, and he must diverge from the path to lay it.

The objection which springs up so suddenly is this: If, as you say, a Christian is no longer under the Law of Moses, but under the free, that is, the unmerited favour of God as the source of his salvation, is not this a distinct license to him to sin? For what else can it practically mean but that the man is set at liberty to keep or to break the law of righteousness at his pleasure?

It will be seen that this is essentially a mere re-appearance, under a slight change of form, of the same antinominian difficulty which was dealt with at the opening of the sixth chapter. He occupied himself then through several verses in laying that difficulty. Yet at the mere sound of this paradox—"not under Law, but grace"—it leaps up afresh, more grim and threatening than before. Are we to sin, he had imagined an objector to inquire at the first verse, in order that the grace of God may have the more to do in forgiving sin? Are we to sin, he supposes the objector to ask now, because we are not under the rule of works as the condition of our salvation?

The reply which St. Paul gives on this second occasion

can only be in substance the same which he gave before. To that recurring difficulty there never has been, nor ever can be, any valid reply save one: this, namely, that the very change which is involved in a man's becoming a believer in God's free grace through Christ, renders his continuance in sin a practical impossibility. This is what the Apostle's answer in the earlier passage amounted to when he said: Union to Christ makes us dead to sin; how can we live any longer in it? This is just what his answer now amounts to when he says in the end of the chapter: Christians were slaves to sin once, no doubt; but conversion has broken that service in order that they should enter another. They are now "servants unto righteousness."

A few sentences will suffice to make it clear how he puts this.

First of all, it is assumed that moral agents must either keep or break God's Law, either sin or obey. As subjects of God with a Law prescribed to us which covers the whole field of conduct, we cannot act at all without either conforming to the divine commands or traversing them.

Further: In choosing to act on either of these principles of conduct—obedience or lawlessness—a man becomes of necessity subject to it. He lends himself to carry it out. Whoever gives practical effect to the will of any one, becomes *de facto* his servant (verse 16). So it is in the case before us. If I act as the Law of God prescribes, I am serving God's designs, for I am giving effect to His righteous will; or, as Paul puts it, I become subservient to the rule of obedience, with this result that I attain to righteousness. If, on the other hand, I yield to illicit promptings, then I make myself the instrument of a will at variance with God's, or, in other words, become subservient to the principle of lawlessness, which is Sin. Between these

two forms of subservience, it is true, as will presently be seen, that there is an enormous difference; for the one is a real bondage of the human will to a tyrannic power, whereas in the other is to be found the only moral freedom possible to a creature. Still, the parallel holds sufficiently, so far as the main point of the comparison is concerned. The point intended is just this, that we cannot act at all without giving practical effect either to the will of God or to another will which is not the same as His.

From this it results that so soon as any one ceases to yield service to the one of these contrasted lords, he must of necessity begin to serve the other. Both righteousness and sin we cannot do at the same time. In ceasing to do the one, we fall, whether we like it or not, under the other. St. Paul's mode of expressing this is peculiar, simply because he carries through his metaphor of servitude without flinching. To be practically a slave to sin means to be free (so to speak) from the service of righteousness, and conversely. But his meaning is clear enough. The idea is just this, that no neutrality is possible nor any double service. To drop the one style of moral action is to adopt the other.

All this is of course perfectly obvious so soon as it is stated. Now, what was the actual position of the Roman Christians with reference to these two forms of moral action?

They had been slaves of sin once. That they knew only too well. In the habitual practice of pride, lust, revelling, revenge, profanity and the like, members of the Roman Church had grown up to man's estate. Prior to their conversion, this was their mode of life, and by experience it had been burnt into their convictions that such yielding to illicit impulses was indeed a servitude. What the Apostle's metaphor of a slave's lot signified did not need

to be told. That the Christians of Rome knew very well; some of them through their own daily endurance of it. It meant hard and unrequited and bitter toil, in which there was neither dignity nor gladness, neither did it yield those wholesome fruits of sweet content and self-respect which ought to crown all honest labour. Morally speaking, the same description applied to their life before conversion. It applies to every life to-day that is devoted to the service of vicious pleasure or of secular gain or of fashion. All pleasing of one's own ungodly desires is a moral bondage. It degrades the soul. In the end it repays its slave with moral death for its wage. Paul could appeal to the experience of his correspondents: "What fruit had ye at that time in the things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death" (verse 21).

Thank God, he cries, such servitude is past! Their heathen life lay behind them, as Egypt lay behind fugitive Israel in the free desert. To each member of that early Roman Church there had come a day, when glad news first reached him of a Father's grace, cleansing the soul in the blood of His Son. The strange story was sweet to hear. It fascinated them. It had in it a certain unearthly peacefulness and purity. To the influence of the new teaching they one by one yielded themselves, heart and soul. They took on the "form and pressure" of the novel truth taught by foreign Jews about Jesus the Christ and pardon and holiness in Him. Since then their very being had been running like molten metal into a fresh mould, into the mould of Jesus Christ. They knew themselves—their neighbours knew them—to be changed men. Paul himself had heard of them that they were slaves to sin no more. In the message of free mercy, forgiving and justifying the chief of sinners, these Romans had found a

power adequate to break the bondage of evil habits and quench the fire of unholy passion and tame their pride and check upon the lip the accustomed oath and free them from inbred forms of vice such as used to sit upon them like a possession. Shall these men be told, forsooth, that being justified by grace they are free now to sin if they list? Why, here was the very thing which grace had done for them—to set them free from sin, free to be holy! In liberating them from the hated yoke of evil, had it not by a moral necessity bound them under the counter-rule of righteousness? In Paul's energetic language, "being made free from sin, they were become enslaved to righteousness" (ver. 18).

The expression is indeed an unusually strong one, even for St. Paul; so strong that he deems it well to apologise for it (at verse 19). For while the practice of sin is really a moral slavery, as our Lord Himself taught,* seeing that it involves the subjugation of what is noblest in a man beneath some base or petty desire of which in his heart he feels ashamed, there is no true bondage in obeying God. On the contrary, the law of righteousness is the law of man's original and proper nature—his native law, so to speak. To follow it is to act freely. For this is after all the only conception we can frame of freedom on the part of any creature; not that the creature should act without control or against rule, but that it spontaneously fulfils the law of its own being, so as to give healthful play to whatever is best or highest in the creature's life. For a man, that means freely obeying the will of God. Accordingly, when the Apostle spoke above about being a "slave to righteousness," he employed language which he feels to be harsh, because, in any strict sense of it, both inaccurate and unworthy. In order to contrast the believer's present

* In St. John viii. 40.

state more vividly with his past one, Paul has retained this image of servitude in a sphere where it is inappropriate. He has paralleled for a moment the service of God with the service of sin, because without some such image it would have been difficult to render his meaning with equal force. For, as he explains in verse nineteenth, it belongs to our human infirmity that we can never think or speak with perfect accuracy about divine truth, simply because our ideas reach us first through material media so that our language is coloured with metaphor. When spiritual conceptions have to be draped in a garb of material imagery, it is inevitable that they share in the imperfection or in the clumsiness of their earthly dress.

Nevertheless, St. Paul endeavours to say what he means in more precise and less metaphorical language (verse 19, *b*.). What it amounts to is this: That as a man previous to his conversion to Christ yielded up his faculties to execute lawless desires, and thus did the work of Lawlessness as a slave serves his master, so, after conversion has put an end to that, he must in a similar way give himself up to perform the lawful or righteous will of God. Conversion, in a word, means just this change—neither more nor less. It can be described as an exchange of masters. It involves setting a man free from the bondage of the will to evil: and that must imply that he does good instead.

This, then, being the state of the case, it is manifestly idle to speak of any converted person as if he were at liberty to sin if he likes. Language like that affords no intelligible sense, so soon as one knows what one is talking about. It follows that the difficulty raised in the fifteenth verse has no existence in fact. It is really little more than a logical juggle. Any change which left a man free to sin would in point of fact be no change at all; no change such

as Christians intend by conversion; no such change as leads to salvation from sin.

So far of this paragraph purely as a piece of argument. Before he has done with his digression, however, St. Paul enforces the practical bearing of all this upon his correspondents. He does so by drawing an effective contrast between the ultimate issues of life christian and life unchristian. His correspondents had had some experience of both. He calls them to consider what that experience taught them. "What was the fruit," he asks, "of your former life? What was the end of it? Of fruit it bore none that deserved the name. No honest, kindly, wholesome conduct, such as brought a blessing to others or satisfaction to yourselves in the retrospect. And, as to its end, that was moral death. But your new life in Christ, on the contrary: what a blessed harvest of holy actions is it bearing even now, crowning your days with the active and passive virtues of a good character! Whilst for the issue of it, have you not a large outlook into the never-ending happy life to come?"

What these Romans had thus experienced is exactly what every sincere Christian has found out for himself. The unregenerate life is a fruitless one. By "fruit" in Bible phraseology we are to understand such actions, or such issues of action in habit and in character, as it is possible for a man to look back upon with satisfaction, and for his fellowmen to reap advantage from, and for his Judge to commend at the last. How bare of any result like this, the irreligious life must be, it sometimes takes a long time to find out. That discovery may not come till the very end, when life is as good as over. Then he who would take stock of the harvest of his years may find the gains he reckoned on to be but illusory—nothing

left of permanent worth to be taken with him into the eternal state.

Such waste is bad enough; a handful of chaff for one's pains. But there is worse behind. He who serves sin serves a master that will pay his wage for the day's labour. A slow return, perchance, and a grim: but sure! The outraged laws of both physical and moral nature avenge themselves at last; and the end is death. All sin wars against well-being. It corrupts more than the blood. It works like poison in the soul. It kills by degrees the taste for purity, the reverence for truth, the capacity for faith, the power of sympathy, the sentiment of humanity, the faculty for the divine! So, when it is finished, it brings forth death.

If Death is the wage which Sin pays to its servant, what is the wage of God? Life? Not so. St. Paul is fond of a balanced sentence, but not at the expense of truth. Here every reader must have noticed how he sacrifices the balance of a sentence which reads almost like an epigram (ver. 23), that for the word "wage," he may substitute a far sweeter and more accurate word, "free gift." The exchange is a reminder of a deep truth. When a man abandons Sin's service to take up that of his natural Lord, God does not set him a task in hope to win spiritual life at the end of it. No: He makes the penitent an instant gift of life. For it is the primary condition of all true service to be rendered to the Most High, that His servant shall be alive! Spiritual life therefore He bestows of His grace, not as the reward of obedience but as the condition of it. Life in the joy of His favour, life by the Spirit of His Son! Life which through the faithful exercise and improvement of it in the doing of His will shall become, as the days pass, more abundant and fruitful and victorious for evermore!

CHAPTER XVII.

"*LAW* VERSUS *GRACE*."

"Or are ye ignorant, brethren (for I speak to men that know the law), how that the law hath dominion over a man for so long time as he liveth? For the woman that hath a husband is bound by law to the husband while he liveth; but if the husband die, she is discharged from the law of the husband. So then if, while the husband liveth, she be joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if the husband die, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress, though she be joined to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ; that ye should be joined to another, even to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were through the law, wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were holden; so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter."—ROM. vii. 1-6.

THESE verses contain an exposition for the theme or text of which one has to look back as far as to the fourteenth verse of the preceding chapter. St. Paul had been led at that point to say, that sin does not exert any mastery over Christian men because they are no longer "under the Law, but under Grace." This is the statement which he now proceeds to explain. Out of that brief utterance some ten verses back there spring such questions as these: What it is to be "under the Law:" How Christians have escaped from that position: Why the Law failed to break the dominion of sin: And how their new position "under Grace" effects that result. To these questions we shall now find the inspired theologian addressing himself. What lies between, therefore, and

was briefly dealt with in our last chapter, has been simply a parenthesis or digression. It was inserted, as we saw, to ward off a possible abuse of his teaching as if it favoured antinomian license.

The point, then, to be discussed in these half-dozen verses must be kept steadily in view:—Christians are no longer dealt with on the footing of the Law of Moses, but on a footing of Grace: one blessed result of which has been to break the practical power of sin over the Christian life. It will assist a clearer understanding of the course of argument by which this thesis is sustained if we sketch it beforehand in brief. It is as follows:—

First, the Apostle lays it down as a general principle that nothing save death can cancel legal obligation or free a man from legal contracts, but that death always does so. This he illustrates by the instance of the marriage contract. Next, he applies the axiom to the case of Christians. Their legal death has taken place through the judicial crucifixion of their Representative, and that has cut them loose from the obligations of Mosaic Law. It was quite needful (he goes on to explain) that the hold of legal obligations should be thus broken, if ever we were to be saved from sin; since the influence of the Law over human minds never did in point of fact lead to holy action. On the contrary, it rather provoked the evil in the heart to greater activity. But when the death of Christ severed the hold of the Law over men, it was to substitute for that sterile principle of legality one which is vital and fruitful. In the room of Law, what we have now to do with is the Grace of God, uniting the soul to Christ as the source of spiritual power. Thus the Gospel has practically secured that fruitfulness in holy living which, under the antiquated legal system, proved to be quite unattainable.

It is worth while to follow this course of thought in detail, for it assists us to understand a good deal that is quite characteristic in St. Paul's way of looking at the Gospel.

I. First, then, let me say a few words about St. Paul's maxim that it is death which puts an end to all obligation created by statute-law.

Expositors have often remarked how fond this Apostle was of legal phraseology, and especially of illustrations borrowed from jurisprudence. His whole doctrine of justification, as we have it in the earlier portion of this Epistle, is in fact cast in a forensic mould. The verses immediately preceding this chapter describe conversion in language borrowed from an ancient legal process for the manumission of slaves. Elsewhere we find him illustrating the relation of a Christian to God as his Father by that usage of Roman law known as the "adoption" of a son. In harmony with the same obvious tendency of his mind, St. Paul is here borrowing a legal maxim to set forth the necessity for our Lord's judicial death, and citing an instance of it from the marriage-law of the Hebrews.

The maxim is this: Nothing save death can ordinarily cancel the binding obligation of civil law over its subjects; but death always does so. It holds of the validity of a statute in any civilised state. But it is of the Law of Moses Paul is thinking; and there the maxim held all the more that the Hebrew code, being of divine origin, could never be altered by any earthly legislature, and that it pressed upon the conscience of the subject with a religious as well as a civil obligation. In illustration, St. Paul selects an instance from the law of contracts. Of all social contracts, the most indissoluble is wedlock. Once legally ratified, that tie could not be dissolved, at

least on the female side, except by death. Mosaic Law claimed the loyalty of a Jewess to her husband so long as they both should live, all other changes notwithstanding. Yet this tenacious hold of the Law, which nothing else could undo, was undone in an instant by the touch of Death. This hour, a second union meant for the Hebrew wife a capital offence; the next hour, it meant for the Hebrew widow a lawful, if not laudable, act.

What we are clearly meant to gather from this legal illustration is that the decease of Jesus as the legal Representative of His people was necessary in order to dissolve the claims over them of the Divine Law. Let it be remembered that the Law of Moses was not solely social or political, regulating such contracts as marriage or the like. The chief and central portion of it was ethico-religious, prescribing the conduct of each subject towards his God. Between Israel and Jehovah it recognised or constituted a contract. In that great "covenant" it held the Jew bound to fulfil his side; and upon his absolute or faultless obedience, it suspended that favour and blessing which formed the divine side. From the obligation of this legal contract no Jew could procure liberation save by death, any more than the Hebrew wife from the law of her husband.

But in this its ethico-religious aspect we must recognise in the Mosaic Law something more than a merely Hebrew code. At the heart of it, did it not express in word and enforce by contract just that "common law" of duty under which every man is born? It lent a formal ratification to that tacit contract under which, by the very fact of our being moral creatures of God, we have all to stand—to which, in one shape or another, every one's conscience bears witness. So soon as any human being awakes to the consciousness of duty, so that he is aware

of a divine imperative within his own bosom, he may be said to have come under legal obligation to the Lawgiver and Judge of all men.

This indeed is not the point at which to discuss how the death of Jesus on the cross came to be such a death as sets free from the claims of the Law. It is plain enough that the mere physical act of decease will not discharge a soul from responsibility to God. The physical decease of a husband sets his wife free, it is true; but that is because the bond betwixt them is a social contract, and the tie it forms is a tie of the flesh. There must have been, in the great event which we speak of as Christ's death, something more than a material dissolution of soul from body. It has been already explained in the course of the Apostle's argument* how the death of Christ came to be such as closed His connection with sin by discharging the claims of the Law over Him. That therefore need not be here repeated; what has now to be emphasised is simply the result that, without such a dying as amounted to a "death to the Law," there was no possibility, for Him or us, of getting clear of its grasp as a contract binding men to obedience under pain of death. But His death having been previously shown to be of such a character, it follows that He has been discharged, and His people along with Him, from the legal condition: "Ye also were made dead to the Law through the body of Christ."

II. This leads to the next point in the Apostle's exposition. It was, he contends, indispensable that men should be thus loosed from the legal obligation, if ever they were to attain to real holiness. Practically, what had the effect been of the Mosaic covenant? For many a century

* Compare what is said in an earlier chapter at page 168.

it had been tried upon human nature. The delicate relations of the soul with God had been cast into its iron mould of statute. God had suspended His favours upon compliance with written regulations. Fear of punishment in the event of failure had been permitted to enter the soul and work there what it had power to work. Did it produce "fruit to God"? Had the issue of this union betwixt an external commandment and human hearts been a living and spontaneous virtue? No such thing. It had done just the opposite.

Few men ever tried the experiment with more sincerity or thoroughness than Paul himself. He had been a devotee of the Law. He had surrendered himself wholly to its influence. Playing upon the conjugal metaphor which he has just employed in another connection, with a freedom foreign to modern taste, he speaks of his readers during their unconverted days as "married" to the Law.* It had certainly been the case with himself. Once it had been the animating principle of his moral and religious nature. What had the result been? Why, this: that it stirred up within him the passionate stirrings of sin, (*παθήματα*, ver. 5). Slumbering impulses to evil, which before lay dormant or unquickened, were energised by its presence. Among these aroused "passions" I reckon the blind craving after what is forbidden; the zest which in-

* The word "married" used at verse 4 by the Authorised Version has been replaced in the Revised by "joined." No objection can well be taken to this change, since nothing exactly corresponding to either English word occurs in the original (*εἰς τὸ γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς ἑτέρῳ*). At the same time the underlying metaphor of the conjugal relation does not depend on the use of a word. It is hinted at plainly enough all through the passage. The change at the close of verse 4 from the second to the first person plural seems to suggest that already *his own case has begun to be present to the mind* of the writer; and does in fact prepare for the complete change to the first person *singular* which follows at verse 7.

dulgence acquires when it violates a command; the native hatred of all authority that is too nakedly displayed; the suggestion of wrong through the very words which prohibit it; the smouldering of a suppressed fire of lust because it is denied vent. These and the like workings of human nature under the influence of constraint were among the "fruits" of the Law in the flesh of Paul.

It is surely superfluous to add that what makes Divine Law so worthless as an instrument of discipline was not its contents—these were "holy and good"—but the form in which it came, of an outward imperative command, claiming subjection on pain of the death-penalty. It was the sense of being constrained, not from within the will, but by a force without; constrained through fear and not inclination; constrained by a naked authority which is unsympathetic and unwelcome. All this St. Paul sums up after his manner in a single phrase, when he adds that the old discarded system was not "one of the spirit but of the letter." The expression was familiar to his thoughts at the time; because the same contrast is explained more at large in a well-known passage of his Second Letter to Corinth, written shortly before the date of this Epistle to Rome.* The *lex scripta* of Mosaism failed because it was only a *lex scripta*. It stood over against the fallen nature of man as the bare utterance of a stronger will, an imperative as cold and rigid as the stone it was graven upon, with nothing about it to quicken inward affection or move the deep springs of spiritual good in the human heart. Coming in a fashion like that, even the lovely and perfect will of the Most Blessed One became, to the rebellious instincts of His creature, a provocative to disobedience.

This records an experience with which the modern

* Compare 2 Cor. iii. *passim*.

mind can perfectly sympathise, because it corresponds with the facts of human nature still. Have not we also felt the risings of self-will in proportion as we realised the pressure of an authority which we could not but respect and yet had never learnt to love? And do we not know that neither the religion nor the morality which is extorted by such a system has the breath of life in it? So long as truth or temperance or purity is only observed outwardly through dread for the consequences of transgression, is not the real inclination of one's heart apt to take its own revenge for such an enforced and mechanical virtue of appearances, by some secret indulgence or an inward rebellion which is not a whit better than open vice would be?

Such constrained virtue as this lingers even in the bosom of the Christian Church; since under the most evangelical teaching people who are not really renewed in spirit may remain thorough legalists. They may do their duty, not as an outgrowth of the inner life, but as a violence that is put upon their real inclinations; and they may hope to make themselves good at the last by working thus from the outside inwards, instead of from the inside outwards. But the goodness which can be forced in this way is not living goodness. Such conduct as results from the contact of an external law with an unrenewed will remains morally dead, and so the union is after all a sterile one. Christ could render no better service than to rupture that connection altogether. He could effect nothing worth calling "salvation" till He had ruptured it. It was broken for the believer by His death. When the Law was satisfied for us by His obedience unto the cross, it was silenced. He is "the end of the Law unto righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. x. 4).

But this unfruitful alliance betwixt the unregenerate heart and the outward Law of duty as a condition of divine favour is broken only to be replaced by a better. "Made dead to the Law," says St. Paul, "that ye should be joined to Another," or should become Another's. A new Lord steps into the vacant seat of moral control and begins to exert His quickening influence upon the moral life. That Other is Christ Himself, risen from the dead and reigning in virtue of the "grace" He brings. If I am so joined to Him as to be delivered from the Law through His death, then I must be so joined to Him as also to be animated by His life. In the room of the dead letter of Moses' decalogue, prescribing duty to a dead soul, Christ breathes into the man a living Spirit. His Spirit quickens love, and love is the principle of obedience. His Spirit operates from the centre of the moral being, new-making us, right out to the circumference. At the centre He kills the lawless principle of pride, self-will or rebellious desire. He generates instead a dominant love for the will of God. That love for what pleases God proves itself the parent of a troop of happy impulses, and pure affections, and glad obediences to all the holy and perfect will of our Father in heaven.

The Gospel, it is plain, cannot be fairly judged of until it has been traced to the very end of its operations. It will not do to halt midway and raise the premature objection against it that it loosens the foundations of morality by proclaiming men "free from the Law" of God. Wait till you see what follows. When the issue of the whole process has been reached, it is found to be profoundly ethical. Its express design is "that the ordinance of the Law might be after all fulfilled in us" (Rom. viii. 4); only not by the old method, but by a new one. The route is changed, because the former one had been blocked by

human sin; but the end is the same. God can have but one end in all He does—a kingdom of saints. Let no one then misunderstand the scope of the Gospel according to St. Paul because it seems to begin with a perilous and retrograde movement, cancelling the bond which was supposed to bind men to their duty. If it appear at first to abrogate the Law, it is only in order to get the Law obeyed in the end. If this be a roundabout road to holiness, it is at all events the only practicable road that is left for us.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CHAPTER IN SAUL'S EARLY LIFE.

"What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Howbeit, I had not known sin, except through the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet: but sin, finding occasion, wrought in me through the commandment all manner of coveting: for apart from the law sin is dead. And I was alive apart from the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died; and the commandment, which was unto life, this I found to be unto death: for sin, finding occasion, through the commandment beguiled me, and through it slew me. So that the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good. Did then that which is good become death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might be shown to be sin, by working death to me through that which is good;—that through the commandment sin might become exceeding sinful."—ROM. vii. 7-13.

THE veneration which the Jewish people cherish for their sacred Law has always been one of the honourable features of their character. In the modern synagogue, indeed, this veneration approaches to a superstition. The MS. roll of the "Torah" or Law of Moses is there enshrined in the holy place and treated with every mark of reverence. Of this ancient Law of God, St. Paul has just been saying what sounded to Hebrew ears both strange and severe. Not only has his argument led him to press the fact that by trying to observe the Law men never attained to holiness, nay, that the soul needs to be quite broken off from legal bonds if ever it is to bring forth fruit unto God; but he has ventured to assert, on the other side, that the practical influence of the Law had

been positively hurtful to morality. What he said was this (ver. 5), that before he and others became Christians, the "passionate movements" of sin stirred up by the Divine Law actually operated to "bring forth fruit unto death." It was a strong thing to write to a congregation which, though for the most part Gentile, embraced many Jews, because it appeared to involve a grave reflection upon the morality of the Divine Law, a reflection which would have shocked Paul's own sentiments quite as much as those of his readers. For his own sake, therefore, as well as theirs, he hastens to explain himself more fully. His object is to show precisely how it is that the Law of God, though itself good and holy like its Author, can yet act in such a way upon the depraved nature of men as to aggravate instead of curing their moral disorder.

He does this by citing as an instance his own early experience. In many respects Paul was a typical Jew. With not more than two or three possible exceptions, his was as grand a nature as that race has ever yielded. The moral and religious faculties (by which I mean chiefly longing after righteousness and power to apprehend the Divine) had always been the strong point of Hebrew character on its best side, and those were exceptionally noble and prominent in Paul. His training, too, had been intensely national and of the best sort. Everything had helped to make him in his youth a favourable specimen of what the Mosaic Law could do in purifying or elevating the character. If such a man, so finely moulded, so deeply religious, so carefully reared, could declare that, after all, the effect of the Jewish Law on him had been bad rather than good, no better proof could be asked for the general position which he had just laid down, startling as that position might sound.

Let us see, then, how this great man lifts the veil from his own early experience of the Mosaic system as a moral discipline.

In the first place, he repels with energy the idea that there can be anything essentially bad, unholy, or immoral about the blessed Law of God itself. On the contrary, but for that Law, he could never have reached any real knowledge of sin. His words are: "*What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? God forbid that I should say that. Nay, but I had never known what sin is except by means of the Law.*" This is a very different thing from making the Law itself an immoral thing. Indeed, it implies the opposite of that; because it is only in the light that we can see the foul. Only by the Law's clear discovery of moral good does it bring home to us the conviction of sin's sinfulness.

But what does St. Paul mean by telling us that he was ignorant of sin save for the Law? Did he need, or do we, any such revelation from Heaven to make us see that sin is sin? Yes, in the deep sense in which Paul's abstract term "SIN" is to be understood. For though certain sinful actions carry their natural condemnation with them, yet the radical depravity of human nature out of which they flow, with its essential antipathy to God and to His will, is not, in fact, recognised by men apart from the Divine Law. How profound is the principle of evil in us, or how mighty its energy, or how insuperable the resistance which it offers to good, these things are not known until the imperative of God requiring inward holiness is pressed home upon the instructed conscience.

It grows plain that this is what St. Paul means by his ignorance of sin apart from the Law of Moses, when he goes on to assign the reason for it in these words:

"I was ignorant of sin but for the Law, *for* (he adds) *I should never have known forbidden desire unless the Law had said, Thou shalt not desire.*" Here St. Paul has put his finger upon the most characteristic and original of all the ten Words of the Decalogue. The other prohibitions of that code against image-worship, against Sabbath-breaking, against murder, theft, perjury, and so forth, might very well have been read, so far as the mere words went, as statutes of a civil character intended to protect society against overt acts only. Down to this point the Law appears certainly to regulate the Jew in his outward conduct as the citizen of a theocratic commonwealth and nothing more. But this tenth commandment does not deal with overt act at all, but with inward longing. It transcends, therefore, the function of civil legislation by entering that secret domain of each man's undivulged desires, where only God is Witness and Judge. To do this shows that the Divine Law (unlike that of human legislators) tracks the sinful habit back from conduct to motive, or inwards from indulgence to the wish to indulge. Thus it adds a new and vaster province to the realm over which law presides. It discovers sin (or law-breaking) to be a deeper-seated thing than we supposed. It makes obedience tenfold harder than before. Indeed, the aspect of every one of the other nine commandments is affected by this tenth one; for the important thing about it is not the list of forbidden objects of desire: "Thou shalt not covet this, that, or the other possession of thy neighbour." The important thing is the prohibition of illicit desire itself: "Thou shalt not covet," as Paul quotes it. As it stands, it reads very like a supplement to the law against theft. But if evil desire lie within the cognisance of law at all, then you must interpret the other commandments likewise in a deeper sense. "Thou shalt not

murder" must now mean—Thou shalt not have any wish to murder; "Commit no adultery" becomes equivalent to a prohibition of lust, and so on.

It was this last command of the ten which played so great a part in the moral education of Saul of Tarsus. The time was when he lived "without the Law." He alludes, I presume, to that happy stage of immature life when the conscience has not yet begun to deal in earnest with the will of God, especially as that will searches the motives and inward wishes of the heart. During childhood, and sometimes well on into early youth, we do not realise God's Law. Rules of course we have to guide us, laid down by parent, nurse, or tutor; but these are only for the visible conduct. Even as a guide to conduct, they exert but a feeble pressure upon the conscience so long as they are not felt to reflect the higher law of God Himself. During this period, therefore, one troubles oneself little or not at all about inward evil, if only the behaviour approves itself to one's guardians. Hence there is little or no inward strife. The bitterness of a contest with secret passion is scarcely known. The life is chiefly outward, and flows on for the most part in a bright, energetic, unreflecting current. This, said Paul, as he looked back to his boyhood at Tarsus, with its keen animal spirits and comparative freedom from the agony of a fight with base desire—this was life indeed. "I was alive" then:—unconscious of spiritual death, in a childish dream of innocence.

Such a state cannot last. A moment arrives when the Law of God comes home to the conscience with new power. In the case of young Saul it was especially that tenth commandment which came home. It became plain to him that God forbids not merely doing wrong, but wishing wrong. He saw that to be good, therefore,

one has to watch the earliest budding of a bad wish within the heart; Nay, that if the bad wish bud there at all, the Law is already and in that fact broken. Ah! the happy dream-life was ended then. To fall back from the joyous world of energy in which he has thoughtlessly revelled, to another world within, the dark, deep, bad world of his own heart; to be forced to watch, criticise, and censure his own likes and dislikes; to find that out of some miserable abyss of evil beneath the surface of his soul unlawful longings after unlawful joys were for ever bubbling up—longings which he might check, indeed, from shaping themselves into act, but which he could not keep from rising into consciousness: here was the death of all his peace and gladness. "Sin revived," says he, with a terse pathos; "sin awoke unto life, and *I died*."

It was not simply that he had now learned to "know sin." There was that in it, no doubt. Sin is not really known till the power of illicit desire is experienced. What may be termed the constitutional vigour of the sinful principle in us cannot be judged of (especially in well regulated society) by its visible effects upon conduct. It betrays itself further back than conduct, in the irrepressible movements of the mind after bad, and low, and shameful things. In the bitter temper, for example, which is suppressed by biting the lip; or in the lewd image which haunts the shrinking imagination; or in the envious wish to be as happier men are; or in the recoil from religious duty as an irksome penance; or in the passionate craving of the will after leave to do as others do—drink with unbridled lips the gleaming goblet of delight: in things like these, when they first begin to stir within the young man, he does indeed learn to know better what sin means.

But that is not all. The coming of the tenth com-

mandment to young Saul's conscience seemed to him positively to aggravate his sinful cravings. The more its searching words kept ringing in his ear, "Thou shalt not lust after any forbidden thing," and the greater his efforts to keep that law, so much the worse became his imprisoned desires after self-indulgence. It was not merely that he thought it made him worse. It was according to human nature that it should do so. For in the meeting of two opposites is revealed their force. A rock in the channel makes the water chafe. So does prohibition lend zest to indulgence, and so it is the Law which is the strength of sin.* "Stolen waters are sweet, and pleasant is the bread that must be eaten in secret." † Take the oldest and best example of what one may see every day: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Yet, "the tree is good for food: a tree to be desired to make one wise. In the day ye eat, your eyes shall be opened: ye shall be like God, knowing good and evil." Thus the serpent, "taking occasion by the commandment," beguiled our mother Eve by his subtlety; ‡ and the old story is always repeating itself anew. It did so in Saul's experience. *Sin*, as a principle of action, not now outside, but alas! deep in one's very self, became Saul's deceiver. It took its opportunity from the divine prohibition. It held up the forbidden thing as the more desirable because it was forbidden: as forbidden just because it was so desirable. It stirred up slumbering longings; and whether these were carried into action or not, in either event that Law was already broken which says, "*Desire not.*" Thus was the deceived soul betrayed to its death.

What an unexpected revelation have we here of the

* Cor. xv. 56. † Prov. ix. 17.
‡ See 2 Cor. xi. 3; Gen. iii.

experiences of this young Pharisee during his early manhood! So far as the world saw, the youth was blameless enough. He tells us so himself. Writing to Philippi, he says, "If any other man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more;"* and that not in respect of privilege alone, but of conduct as well. "Touching the righteousness which is in the Law, I was found blameless." His, then, was no case of a stained or intemperate youth boiling over into open excess through heat of appetite. Outwardly he was a model of decorum and punctilious observance, reputed upright and grave beyond his years, a youth on whom older men like the religious leaders of the time set their hopes. Yet underneath this fair exterior, what mutinous passions raged! what uprisings of criminal desire! what longings after the forbidden!

The law had failed, then, shall we say? Instead of quenching sin in Saul's soul, it had inflamed it. Instead of bringing to Saul moral and spiritual life, it had killed such life as he enjoyed before. It had produced self-condemnation, inward strife, despair, and death. Was the Law to blame for that? Was it all the fault of this last unlucky commandment of the ten? No; it was the very perfection and glory of the Decalogue that it contained that tenth and most spiritual precept. It was just its exceeding broadness and nobleness which made it impossible for unregenerate Saul to keep it. The Law for its part is holy; and that particular commandment too is holy and right and good. It was no fault of the Law that it wrought in Saul lust and death; but it was the fault of what Saul had now learned to know as SIN. Not sins, but Sin: not sinfulness even as a simple quality of the sinner, but sin as a force, a dread and mighty factor in the human

* Phil. iii. 4–6.

soul, which lies deep, deeper than desire, and proves itself strong, stronger than the better will that strives against it.

Was this, then, I ask again, a failure of the Law's design? That great word spoken by God on Sinai to the Jews—was it intended to produce a holiness which it has plainly failed to produce? Or has it actually disclosed a kind and degree of sin in man which it was never meant to disclose? St. Paul could not believe this. No Jew could believe that the purpose of Jehovah could be at open variance with the facts. No reverent thinker can believe it. Rather we must read the Almighty's purpose in the results. The Law of Sinai cannot have been given in the hope of conducting Israel or any man to spiritual holiness. In so far as it formed a civil code, indeed, it was designed to restrain the citizens from crime and from impiety; and this to some extent it did. But when it went beyond civil legislation, in virtue of that tenth commandment which animated the rest with a spiritual sense, and asked obedience in thought and wish and inward liking as well as the obedience of act; to that extent it never can have contemplated an impossible fulfilment. What its Divine Author did contemplate was, that it should reveal to any man who honestly tried to keep it the hopeless strength of sin within him, and the irreconcilable resistance which that sin offered to any real or spiritual subjection to God's will—any holiness that is more than skin-deep. In His mercy He meant men to learn this bitter, humbling, but most salutary lesson, that the natural heart is "enmity against God, since it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. viii. 7). In the practical discovery of this fact lay the best preparation for the Gospel of God's grace. Here was that experience which ripens a sinner to welcome the gratuitous grace of God when it bringeth salvation and

the Spirit of God Who bringeth life, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

To a large extent a similar service is still rendered by the Law of God. What was wrought once on a great historical scale in the experience of Israel as represented by such men as Paul has substantially to be the experience of most of us. Has the Divine Law ever come home to our conscience as a spiritual commandment, requiring our most deep and hidden desires to be after godliness? Have we earnestly striven to keep that Law and experienced that inward death of self-satisfaction which ensues when one seeks to force holiness upon the feelings and longings of the heart—and fails? Is any man wretched because he cannot—do what he may—subordinate his real inclinations to the will of God: but must, the more he tries to do so, rise in protest against that holy will as not *his own real will*? Out of that helpless misery of a soul in bonds of sin there is no door of escape save one. It lies here: "The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the Law of sin and death."

CHAPTER XIX.

MORE AUTOBIOGRAPHY: DUALISM IN THE LIFE.

"For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I know not: for not what I would, that do I practise; but what I hate, that I do. But if what I would not, that I do, I consent unto the law that it is good. So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me. For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise. But if what I would not that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me. I find then the law, that, to me who would do good, evil is present. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I myself with the mind serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."—ROM. vii. 14–25.

THIS chapter from the seventh verse onwards is probably the most remarkable piece of autobiography ever written. As a demonstration in spiritual self-anatomy, it has no equal, not merely in the Bible, but in literature. St. Paul's rare experience as a religious man, together with his native tendency to introspection and his skill in subtle analysis, admirably qualified him for such a task.

The earlier portion of the passage down to the thirteenth verse inclusive has presented no serious difficulty. We have seen how it illustrates by the history of Paul's own

case at a certain period of his life the tendency of the Law to intensify rather than to subdue evil desire. St. Paul cites this experience of his to show how impossible it was that the Mosaic Law could be the instrument of our salvation from sin. At the same time he is anxious to make it clear that this arose from no fault in the Law itself. The Law of God was not a bad thing because it occasioned such bad results. The blame for these bad results must be charged home, not against the Law, which was holy and good, but against the principle or force of Sin in fallen human nature. The principle of Sin worked death in him by means of the good Law, that its own surpassing sinfulness might become apparent.

We are thus brought face to face with this fact, that between the divine Law of duty and our own sinful nature there is a radical and hopeless antagonism. That is the fact which lies at the bottom of the whole situation, and puts it utterly out of the question for the Law to save a man. If at the very root of perverted human nature there is a repugnance to the divine will which nothing can overcome, and which only displays itself with greater acuteness when you try to force God's Law on men, then it is abundantly clear that for a state of things so hopeless as this no remedy can be found inside of human nature itself. There must be some saving power from without or from above mankind.

This is the great thought which underlies the remainder of the seventh chapter. It leads up to the glorious discovery in the next of a divine Force—a Spirit of Life—to do in us what the Law could not do.

When we proceed to ask how this thought is worked out in the following verses from the fourteenth onwards, the interpretation of them becomes very difficult indeed.

The difficulty lies here. At verse fourteen St. Paul drops the past or historical tense and commences to speak of himself in the present. It is no longer "I was," but "I am." This may be understood in one of two ways. Either he is continuing his piece of autobiography, bringing it down to his converted period so as to tell us his experience of Law and of sin, as a Christian man, at the present date of writing to Rome. This is certainly the most natural way to read it. But on this reading does not Paul speak too strongly in some places of the corruption remaining in his regenerate state? "I am carnal: sold under sin:" what worse could he say of unregenerate men? Is it true of the Christian that he can only wish for a goodness which he is unable to attain? Or, to avoid this difficulty, you may suppose that Paul is speaking in the first person, not to describe his own Christian experience, but as a representative of fallen mankind at large. He may wish to show in a vivid, dramatic form, how the fallen race at its best struggles against sin, but struggles in vain before Christ's help came, recognising in its heart the law of virtue and goodness, yet quite unable to overcome the power of sin or to realise the ideal after which it secretly longs. Unfortunately this rendering of the passage encounters objections still more serious than the other. How can it be fairly said of unregenerate human nature that it delights in God's Law, or that its sinful actions are no more its own doing, but the doing of sin that dwells in it? How can we on this method explain the strong terms in which St. Paul sums up the whole: "So then with the mind I myself serve the Law of God"? Such words will scarcely fit in to any Scriptural account of man's fallen condition.

So formidable are these difficulties on both sides that one need not be surprised to find this passage hotly con-

tested between theologians of opposite schools. Divines who incline to take as favourable a view of original depravity as possible find here the surviving love of virtue even in fallen man crying out in its wretchedness for a Saviour. These prefer the latter interpretation. Those, on the other hand, who believe from other texts that fallen manhood is not the unwilling but the willing slave of sin, and flatly opposed to God's spiritual Law, contend as stoutly for the former.

In a similar way men when they come to examine these verses are biassed by their opinions as to the normal experience and practice of Christian life. People who are anxious to make the most of such a degree of holiness as is possible for a saint on earth cannot read this passage with comfort as a piece of Christian biography. Others who fear to lend encouragement to an exaggerated theory of attainable "perfection" naturally use Paul's language as their chief weapon against it.

Under these circumstances it is extremely difficult to lay aside prepossessions in order to study the passage candidly, with nothing more than a desire to find in it what Paul meant when he wrote, or what the saints at Rome would understand when they read it. At the same time this is what one must try to do. Certainly I shall not fight over it any of those controversies to which I have alluded. My aim is rather to forget them. Shutting out of view every possible theological inference, let us see whether a careful reading of the verses as they stand will not yield to us a natural order of thought running through the passage.

It starts, I think, from the idea which has been already indicated as the outcome of the preceding verses. Sin—in the sense of man's sinful nature, or "*sin in us*"—and the Law of God are opposites. "For we know"—it is an

accepted truth amongst Christians at least—"that the Law of God is spiritual, whereas I for my part am fleshly (or perhaps stronger still, *fleshy*)—sold like a bondman under the power of sin." He has been speaking biographically, in the first person; and he continues to speak so. But in calling himself "carnal" as opposed to spiritual, Paul is describing nothing peculiar to himself. That is a condition common to all men. Neither does he require now to think of any particular period in his own life; because it is true of fallen human nature, as one generation derives it by inheritance from another, and remains true of it so long as it retains its native character, that it is "flesh"—the opposite of spirit. The distinction between the regenerate and unregenerate states does not need, therefore, to be taken as yet into account. What Paul's argument calls him to keep in view is just the radical and inherent contrast betwixt the Law on the one hand, as the utterance of its Spiritual Author, requiring a spiritual obedience and the unspiritual nature of fallen man on the other.

This is the earliest place in this Epistle where these two terms "flesh" and "spirit" occur in clear contrast, with the peculiar ethical sense conferred upon them by our author. In the next chapter we shall find them in constant use, as the key-words of his argument. They bear the same technical force in other passages of his writings. But I can scarcely doubt that St. Paul had in his mind the pregnant use of these two great terms by his Master. Although the classical text for Christ's own employment of them is reported by St. John (whose Gospel is, of course, much later in date), there is nothing improbable in assuming St. Paul to have gathered the phrase from the evangelical traditions which had reached him. On one other occasion at least, recorded by the earliest evangelists, a

similar use of the terms in an ethical sense had been made by our Lord.*

At all events, it is Jesus Himself, in His conversation with Nicodemus, Who first employed the term "flesh" to denote human nature in its birth-state, as each individual of the race inherits it from his ancestry. It describes, therefore, the hereditary nature of mankind as fallen from fellowship with God and under the power of sinful or selfish impulses. With that ungodly "flesh" the Divine Nature itself forms the sharpest of moral contrasts. "God is Spirit:" and must be worshipped or served in spirit by a Spirit-born, Spirit-led man—a son of God. The flesh-born cannot see or know or worship or love the Spirit-God. Now, the point of St. Paul here is, that the Law of God partakes of His own nature. It too is spiritual. It reflects the divine character, for it expresses the divine will. And therefore between *it* and the nature of man, as man now is, there holds precisely the same incompatibility which our Lord affirmed between what is "born of the flesh" and what is "born of the Spirit."

How does this antagonism between man's sinful flesh and the Law of God discover itself?

In relating his own early experience St. Paul had already shown us one way in which it used to discover itself. When the Law first came to him in its spirituality, it provoked his "flesh" to all manner of forbidden desires. It stirred up "sinful passions" to work in his "members" (ver. 5). But he does not go back now on that evidence of the repugnance between flesh and Law. He has begun to speak in the present tense: and in his present state no less than in his past he can find evidence how contrary

* See the words spoken in Gethsemane, preserved by St. Mark (xiv. 38) as well as by St. Matthew (xxvi. 41): "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

these two are the one to the other. This fresh evidence still lay ready to Paul's hand in the practical divergence betwixt his desires and his performances. It is not now "concupiscence" he complains of, a deep secret heart-longing after forbidding pleasures underlying his exterior morality. That he had known once. By provoking to such lustings after what it forbade, the Law had then revealed the opposition of the flesh. At that time the surface of the life seen in conduct looked fair: only a wild world of bad cravings raged underneath. Now, the case is exactly reversed. Now, Paul longs after conformity to the Law, but he fails to give effect to this new longing. What he wishes to do he does not perform: what he dislikes, that he does. Once, he looked a cleaner man than he really was within. Now, he really is a cleaner man than he looks without. The difference is wide: the improvement vast; yet at one point the two states agree. The evidence of a nature antagonistic to Law, and enslaved in some sense to sin, remains as patent as before. For if a man wishes what he cannot perform or performs what he does not truly wish, he is still enslaved. He is carried along as by an alien force. What is that but to be still, in a very sad sense, "carnal, sold under sin"?

I do not understand St. Paul as meaning that when he wrote he experienced none at all of those curbed and evil lustings of which he had made confession in the earlier sentences of this biography. These might or might not survive; but they were not now characteristic of his condition. They had been the most characteristic feature of that bygone phase of experience in pre-Christian days. Now his most characteristic feature is a strange impotency to realise his own good desires. Not merely is the wish better than the performance, but the wish and the performance are at variance: wishing not having

free power to realise itself in act. Neither can we press this as meaning that he never did anything good which he desired to do. The description, "What I would, that do I not," makes no pretence to exhaust the entire moral experience of the writer. Only it does describe one of his experiences; one of the most characteristic and singular. He never felt such an impotency as that before. For so long as his desires were evil, he found no difficulty in fulfilling them if he tried. Then it was only the Law which forbade performance: not any hindrance in his own nature. Now, however, he is in this strange position, that what the Law bids, his own soul wishes, consenting to the Law that it is good, yet very often it does not come to pass in actual speech or conduct. On the contrary, through some interposing force there is the saddest incongruity to be observed betwixt desire and performance.

At this stage, however, Paul finds it needful to be a little more precise. The condition of a person who desires one thing and performs a different thing is a very abnormal one. It is a condition of duality. It looks as if there were two persons confounded in one. Or the man is like a person torn asunder. St. Paul analyses, therefore, and discriminates. He separates the true inward desires of the man which coincide with Divine Law from that other force which bars the performance of good and makes for sin. In the former he recognises (ver. 17) the genuine man, his truest, deepest self. On the latter he bestows this title: "Sin dwelling in me." It is a singular phrase, for it is meant to describe a peculiar and anomalous position. It conveys this idea, that the sinful principle is distinguishable from the real man, since it does not lie at the root of the man's personal life; and yet that it is not, properly speaking, a foreign force for which he has no responsibility, but after all a part of his complex nature.

It is not *he*, indeed, in one sense, and yet it is *in him*, not as a stranger, but as one at home there, as a native inhabitant of his being, for which, as much as for any other part of himself, he is accountable. The explanation and justification of so singular a phrase as this, "Sin residing in me," occupies the Apostle in verses 18 to 20: where he will be found to recognise the "flesh" or native seat of sin's power as still a part of himself; for he says, "In me—that is, in my flesh—no good dwells." In other words, the birth-condition of humanity as affected by the fall and transmitted by physical descent, has not ceased entirely to be the condition of St. Paul. He is still "flesh," though no longer merely or wholly "flesh." That side of his dual being remains the home only of evil, not of good. And in the continuous coexistence of this original nature—seat of sin—along with his desire which coincides with the Law, is to be sought the solution of this singular phenomenon: a man who wills one thing and does another.

After our self-anatomist has thus severed in idea the two components whose mutually limiting action determines his actual experience, he feels himself more free to refer to the better side of himself as his true self. From this point, therefore, he speaks no more of the flesh as "me." But he speaks (ver. 22) of the "inward man" that has its delight in the Divine Law as the true man, who, could he only find unhindered leave to act out his wishes, would do good, and only good, continually. His situation comes, therefore, to be something like this: The deepest innermost desires of the man Paul are on the side of God's spiritual Law. He not only "consents" to it or concurs in it, as good, but he finds a sympathetic satisfaction in its goodness. "I *delight* in the Law of God." It brings a natural relish to his taste, like honey dropping

from the comb (to borrow a very old figure for the same idea). There is not only a Law of God outside enjoining duty, but a "law of the mind" as well, loving duty. This echo within the man or joyful reaffirmation of the Divine Word by the heart is accompanied by an impulse of the nature tending to fulfil it. All this would make obedience sweet and certain and easy, but for one thing. That is a very different kind of law * resident, not (so to say) in the innermost, but in the outermost region of the personal life, "in the members" or the periphery of human nature, viewed as congenital. Within this circumference of sin the "inward man" lies, as it were, enveloped, so that its activity is checked and its tendencies thwarted before they reach actual performance. The good which at heart he desires to do he cannot realise. Nay, that is not all, not the worst of it. Active warfare goes on betwixt these two contradictory tendencies within the man; and the sinful tendency becomes upon occasion the assailant. The spiritual will, coincident with the Divine, is seen entrenched inside the heart, holding the fort. Not merely when it seeks peaceably to accomplish its desires is it hampered by the disinclination of the flesh. The evil impulses are active. They make war upon the soul. Sometimes they carry it captive and hurry the man into deeds of sin which in his heart he detests.

In this sad closing picture of his own experience as to the mutual relations of spiritual Law and sinful flesh, even after his mind became reconciled to the Law, St. Paul has made himself a mirror in which men of earnest holiness and habits of self-scrutiny have in every age seen themselves reflected. Such an internal dualism—such a strife of opposites—such a comparative impotency to realise the good they purpose, are standing characteristics of

* Verse 23, *ἕτερον νόμον*.

saintliness if we may judge saints by their most secret confessions and self-examinations.

Who that knows anything of spiritual life does not know by experience how in every attempt one makes to worship or obey or keep pure and holy, evil is at hand, "present with us"? How it thrusts itself into our most sacred moments, neutralises our best intentions, surprises us into a fault, or, overbearing our resistance, drags the reluctant Christian into unchristian sins? How often, when the mind seems to be bent wholly upon good, does a casual spectacle, or a remote suggestion, call up images of evil! How often, when no cause appears, do appetites leap forth in unexpected force, as if they rose out of some abyss of impurity within, at the bidding of some power of darkness! The *inertia* of the flesh may reduce, as Jesus hinted, the most willing spirit to inaction.* As a watchful foe strongly posted in a troublesome position may neutralise a much stronger army which it dares not challenge on open ground, so this disinclination of fallen nature to what is spiritual keeps the life of the soul to some extent inoperative. The saint may long after communion with God in holy meditation and prayer: but no sooner does he set about it in earnest than he is made aware of an inexplicable sluggishness, or positive backwardness to every pious exercise, which at first he hardly understands, and which he can never entirely overcome. What is this but the power of evil present with me? So always. It starts up a barrier in the path. It neutralises desire. It paralyses effort. One's most serious intentions wither sometimes before they ripen into act, as buds never grow to fruit when spring winds are keen.

It would be putting the case far too absolutely to say

* In the saying already referred to in a previous note: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

that the life of a good man is nothing but a contemptible series of barren wishes. A life of nothing but good intentions would not be a Christian life at all. It is not by the blossom, but by the harvest that a man will in the end have to vindicate his Christian profession, when the harvest-day arrives. Still, no man with a Christian heart in him ever satisfies himself by the measure of his performance. He never is as good as he desires or means to be. There is always a gap—a disappointing and humbling gap—betwixt the ideal cherished and yearned after and the actual behaviour. So that the most literal interpretation of Paul's passionate complaint does not seem too strong to the dissatisfied believer: "To will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not" (ver. 18). While others applaud his virtue, a saint knows how far his own aspirations outbid his poor achievement, and in his closet he lies groaning under the grief of failure. When the soul in her purer moments is beholding the beauty of God's face in Christ, does she not reach out vague longings after such a spiritual temper as she hath not attained to? Do there not come over her visions, divinings of a moral sublimity, a serene equipoise in goodness, a restful perfectness of will, never yet realised? So often as the soul seek to arise and possess that region of pure heavenliness which seems her own, is she not speedily aware that she is chained to a close and heavy burden of earthliness which weighs her down? The flesh shuts her in; and the sweet glimpse dies away, and her feet stumble in the clay, and the things she would she cannot do.

Well for any one of us if we have not cause to understand a still more humbling confession than this. St. Paul speaks of the "Law" in his members as waging such successful war that it even carried him off at times into captivity, like a prisoner of war. For the sinful principle

which has its seat in an inborn disposition makes sudden sallies. When a soul is off its guard there leaps on it some gust of passion, and before it can gather itself up to resist, it is swept forward by the unexpected pressure and is lost. So anger overtakes some, so lust others. Let us entreat God for a watchful temper. Sad is his case who awakes, like Samson in Delilah's lap, shorn both of honour and of strength. Especially if through neglect of fair precautions, through want of prayer, or through rash exposure to temptation, the fallen soul has room to upbraid her own folly as the criminal occasion of her fall.

Sometimes, I believe, Christian men are taken in no surprise. Sometimes old habitual or constitutional sin retains such force even in believers that the integrity of the soul is vehemently overborne by the violence of its bad desires. From such shocks a man collects himself slowly and with pain. After each overthrow he rises with a sense of humiliation and a spiritless fear lest all be lost, such as demoralise a routed army. The intactness of his self-respect is broken; his power to withstand the same sin is sensibly impaired. At such moments, chiefly, (and Paul even would seem to have known such moments), is this cry wrung from the baffled, well-nigh despairing heart: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?"

Like shipwrecked sailor on his raft, this prince of apostles looks all round the sea of tumbling passions which tossed his helpless soul and bore it whither he would not—looks round for help and lifts high his signal and makes his cry pierce heaven. The answer comes on the instant; not from above, but from within. Christian faith needs not to be told who shall deliver. No believer can feel more than a momentary instinctive fear to fail or

sink. On his lips the cry of nature turns at once into the thanksgiving of faith. He knows Whom he has trusted to deliver him. He knows where dwells that power which he finds not in himself. He knows by Whose Spirit his foes can be scattered, and the sin subdued that resides in him:—Whose grace can stay the tide of passion, lend success to his desires for holiness, and out of warfare such as this fetch him forth at last, spoil-crowned like his conquering Lord, with his feet upon the neck of every lust, and his will enthroned to perform without resistance the good he has loved and striven to do. Never in his prechristian past, when the Law only provoked lust in his heart, had Paul learned the terrific force of "Sin dwelling in him" to contend against the Law of God as he has learned it now—in this fiercer struggle after Christian holiness. But now he can give thanks for victory assured. On his side there fights now the divine strength. In Christ Jesus is a Spirit of life. What the Law never could do because it was weak through the flesh, God has done in Christ. The Spirit Whom we have received in Christ is the true answer to every, "Who shall deliver?" Room for despair there is none. Sweet will it be to lay aside the dinted armour of this moral warfare and be no longer harassed with environment of foes: to be all good from centre to circumference, and do, as well as will, the perfect will of God: to be white as the light of God; and sit as victor over the evil self, and rule one's subject-nature in the good King's name! Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

CHAPTER XX.

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the spirit the things of the spirit. For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the spirit is life and peace: because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be: and they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall quicken also your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you."—ROM. viii. 1–11.

"IF Holy Scripture," said Spener, "be a ring, then this Epistle to the Romans is the gem upon it; and the topmost point of that gem is the eighth chapter."

What is there in this chapter which makes it to a devout soul so exceedingly precious? The theme of it, I think, even more than its wonderful elevation of feeling and eloquence of style; the theme of it which is the new life of a Christian in the Holy Ghost. That to be in Christ Jesus is to have the Spirit dwelling in us: how the Spirit delivers us from sin and quickens out of death: how it is the spirit of freedom and of sonship to God: how even the body and the very creatures around are one day to

share in such glorious deliverance: how the Spirit helps our prayers: and how He knits us to the victorious love of God in Christ Jesus in such a way that nothing in earth or heaven can sever us from that redeeming, quickening, and overcoming love: this is the high theme of the chapter we are now to review. It forms a consummation to the Apostle's foregoing argument. It puts a splendid crown on his long vindication of that gospel, of which, even at Rome, he felt no reason to be ashamed, since it is the power of God unto salvation.

In its opening paragraph this chapter carries forward the argument of the seventh, and is closely bound to it. The net result of the autobiography or self analysis which St. Paul has just concluded, is this: There is in fallen human nature such a force of sin resisting the Law of God that it is impossible for that Law, though holy itself, to make any man inwardly good.

In a much earlier portion of this letter, St. Paul exerted his powers of argument to show that by keeping the Law no man could attain to a justified or acceptable state before God. Not by deeds of law, was his conclusion *then*, but by simple trust in Christ's atoning work for us, are we justified and have peace with God. *Now*, for a good while back, he has been demolishing with the same remorseless logic of facts the sufficiency of the Law to sanctify any more than to justify. It cannot break the power of indwelling sin, or make us love what God loves, or quench the fires of illicit desire. Of that his own lifelong experience, as a Jew first, and next as a Christian, had convinced St. Paul.

The problem of human deliverance might therefore appear to be insoluble; whether as deliverance from guilt or as deliverance from sinfulness. But just as St. Paul found an answer to it under the former aspect in the doctrine of

our justification by faith in Christ, so to the problem under its second aspect he finds a solution in the Spirit which they receive who are Christ's. It is at this point that he proceeds to develop his solution. It is not now the problem which asks: How shall guilty man be just with God? but that which asks: How shall fallen man be enabled to keep a holy and spiritual commandment? Of this ancient question, also, Paul had found the answer in the Gospel. It was this: What the Law could not do —since it was rendered weak through the "flesh" or hereditary evil nature of men—God effected by sending His own Son to bestow the Spirit of life and holiness. This constitutes the second triumph of the Gospel. The first was: It alone justifies the sinner, for it provides Christ's atonement for sin and forgiveness through faith in His blood. The second is: It alone sanctifies the sinner, for it brings into his nature the quickening energy of the Divine Spirit to overcome the desire of sin in the soul. Let us only understand these two perfectly, and we shall know the Gospel to be "the power of God unto salvation."

In the verses before us three points are touched on regarding the Gospel as God's power to sanctify. These are (1) the preliminary work which had to be done by the coming of Christ, or the basis laid in the life and death of our Lord with a view to our being sanctified. Next, (2) wherein sanctification really consists: it is the substitution of God's Spirit as a source of moral influence, in lieu of the congenital tendency or drift towards sin of our own nature. And, (3) how this working of the Divine Spirit in a believer must issue in his complete revivification—or the victory of life over death both in soul and body. In other words, we have to look at the *origin*, the *process*, and the *issue* of a believer's sanctification in Christ.

(1.) Its origin in the outward provision by which God secured it. Here is St. Paul's account: "God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (ver. 3).

A great deal evidently turns on opening up the wealth of meaning under this very pregnant and significant term "condemned." The value of our Blessed Lord's incarnation and incarnate work, in so far as it secured His people's holiness, is all meant to be described by that term. Because in Christ, God *condemned* sin, therefore are they set free from it. The word is selected here evidently because Paul has already used it in the first verse. He said there: "No condemnation for those who are in Christ." Here he says: In Christ was condemnation for sin. And he plainly intends the one to hang somehow upon the other: No condemnation for them, *because* in Christ their sin was condemned. What then does condemnation mean? It means whatever sin would have wrought for them of ruin and death had God let it alone. A like ruin and death He brought (so to speak) on Sin itself. The expression, although a peculiar one, is therefore capacious and fruitful.

What does it embrace? For one thing, the life and death of Christ exposed sin in its true evil and hatefulness by letting in upon it the full light of the divine love and goodness: and that was its condemnation. To expose a bad thing is to judge it. The light of heaven's own holy and blessed charity shone in, when the pure Son of God lived or died here. The bad heart of the race was tested by His presence, and seen to be a more hateful, loathsome, and evil thing than any one before had imagined it to be. "If I had not come (said Jesus) and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no excuse for their sin. He that hateth Me, hateth My Father also." Men's sin then is of this dye: it means hatred of God Who is our Father.

"If I had not done among them (He goes on) the works which none other did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father."* God condemned sin in the flesh first by testing and exposing its hatefulness.

Next: God made His incarnate Son the vicarious expiator of the world's guilt: and by that sacrifice of a divine-human life in atonement for human offences, He once for all branded sin with its righteous curse; He "condemned it in the flesh." When His own Son bare our sins in His own body to the tree and suffered for us, the righteous for the unrighteous, surely this terrible revolt of the human will from God, which had made such a vindication of Eternal Justice necessary, was judged as it deserved. It received its doom. God condemned our sin in the flesh by expiating it in death.

Nor is this all. The appearance of the Divine Son in our nature tried the power of the sinful principle and discovered it to be after all feebler than the Spirit of holiness. For the career of our Lord was one sustained encounter between the sinful forces and the holy forces of the world. Like another Adam, He bore the onset of whatever could tempt a holy human will or seduce it from loyal affectionate obedience to God. He came not only in the flesh—true man; but even in the "likeness" of such flesh as is sinful. That is to say, He shared in the outward consequences of our fall, and was assimilated as far as could be to that tempted, suffering, struggling kind of life which has resulted from it. Under disadvantages like these, and amid just such circumstances as surround other men, claiming no exceptional aid, declining no contest to which we are called, but made in all things like unto His brethren, He fought out the good fight of faith to the bitter end: and

* See St. John xv. 22–24.

was not overcome. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit given Him in His baptism, He took to Him the whole armour of God that He might be able to withstand in that evil day, and having done all, He stood—good Captain of salvation as He was, true Man strong in God, stronger than sin. So God condemned sin in the flesh—condemned it not only as hateful, not only as punishable, but as weak too, as beaten where it triumphed before: overcome even in human flesh by the Spirit of holiness.

The practical result of this judgment upon the sinful principle which God wrought in His Son, lies here: that within human nature there is now one point at which sin has been finally atoned for, vanquished, and cast out. The holy life of God has made good its foothold within the area of our sinful race. One Man there is at least—One, if no more as yet—Whose humanity has been liberated from further contact with sin and death and saved and glorified for evermore. "Now," said that Man, "is the judgment of this world! Now shall the Prince of this world be cast out!" "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from Heaven!" It only needs that the same Force which in the human nature of Jesus Christ proved itself mightier than Sin, should operate as successfully on other men; and so it will if only these other men are in Christ Jesus. So that we may boldly say: No condemnation is there now to men in Christ Jesus, since in Christ Jesus God has condemned sin in the flesh.

(2.) From what has now been said it can easily be gathered how, as a matter of practical experience, each of us has to be made holy. Two powers claim regulative influence over us. We are the battle-ground, or debateable land, of gigantic moral forces. The power that makes for sin resides in our own inherited nature. The power that makes for holiness is the Spirit of God Who

resides in Christ, and in us too, if we are one with Christ by faith. Sanctification therefore can only mean that we take care to let the latter power rule us, instead of the former. We are not told simply to do the will of the Spirit instead of the will of the flesh, for that is precisely what we have no power of our own to do. To tell us *that*, would just be to publish another ineffectual law in the room of the Law of Moses. No. What we are told is that our whole nature is to receive into it a new power—a real living force from heaven moving in the line of holy obedience; a divine, helpful, inspiring, indwelling Spirit Whose impulses must in the end prove mightier than the downward drag of our fallen hearts. This we are told, and we are to believe it. What we are called upon to *do* in the matter is to encourage and trust to the action of that mighty holy Power of God. We are neither to grieve Him nor resist Him nor quench Him. On the contrary we are to "mind His things"—as our version has it: that is to say, to study how we may by all means invite and welcome and yield to the action of Christ's Holy Spirit within us.

It is clear to any one who does not let a one-sided logic run away with his good sense, that there is here a real though humble part for a Christian man to play in the great task of his own sanctification. It is true the source of moral power is not primarily in himself: it is in God the Holy Ghost. For all that, the Holy Ghost dwells in us, not after any mechanical or physical fashion, but as one moral Being can reside in and act upon another moral being. At the seat of our moral life He operates after the laws of our nature and in harmony with our personality and free will. He strengthens good affections, encourages good desires, sustains good intentions, enables to good performance. But all this He does in such ways

as assume the concurrence and co-operation of our own will—not thwarting but earnestly falling in with the divine power. Thus we are to give all diligence to make our calling sure, and work out our own salvation, just because it is no other than God Himself Who is working in us, both to will and to do, of His own good pleasure.

Paul cannot, as an earnest teacher, touch on this aspect of his subject without hinting more than one practical exhortation to his readers. For one thing, here is the genuine test of Christian faith. The Christian is a man "in Christ"—as Paul puts it at one place; or, he is "Christ's man," as he puts it at another. In other words, the Christian has a spiritual connection with the incarnate Son of God of such a sort that the same divine force which operated with perfect effect in making Jesus a holy man, operates likewise in the Christian to make him a holy man like Jesus. The same Spirit dwells and works in both Christ and the Christian, to substantially the same result. If this be not so in point of fact you are "none of His." No matter what you believe or profess, you cannot be a living limb in that body of the new humanity whose Head (centre of moral life) is Christ, whose Spirit (medium of moral life) is the Holy Ghost. The test is as easy as it is practical.

Not only that: the Christian cannot be content to know that more or less he has one mind and one spirit with his Master. He must be ever seeking to have more. He is to devote to the things of the Spirit the same attention and effort and study which formerly he devoted to the things of the flesh. He owes it as a debt to God and His Christ that he should earnestly fall in with that design for which God sent His Son. It will be his endeavour to "mortify" or put to death the deeds of the body in order

to fulfil the holy prescripts of the law. If men whose life is fleshly are found pursuing with two-handed earnestness those objects which the flesh desires, how ought we, if we are spiritual, to follow after the things of the Spirit of God!

(3.) Lastly, the blessed outcome or issue of this "walk in the Spirit" of God is (to put it in a single word) *life*. The wages of our sin was death, but the gift of our God is life. To bring out this contrast with as much force as he may, Paul traces by easy steps how these two moral states develop of necessity their proper consequences. Take, first, the state of unspiritual and unchanged human nature, the "flesh," as he terms it. We have seen all along how it is characteristic of fallen humanity that it does not submit itself to the Law of God. Whatever else about it may be fair or hopeful, whatever wild-flowers of sweet kindliness or manfulness it may bear, here you touch its radical defect. What other lesson emerges from Paul's self-anatomy in the seventh chapter but this: that the pressure of the divine Law only provokes contrary desire in the human heart? Leave a man alone and he may act well to please himself. Urge God's will upon him and the chances are he will wish to do the opposite out of contradictoriness, or to assert his independence. He is not subject to law, in fact; being what he is, he cannot be. His nature is essentially a rebel. But this insubordination to God as moral Governor and Lord, indicates enmity. It betrays a condition of hostility more or less suppressed, more or less avowed; still at bottom hostility, not peace. It means that the man is not on good terms with his Maker. He cannot love the Lawgiver, since the mere expression of the Lawgiver's will is enough to set the man up in arms against it. Go deep enough, and you find underlying all unregenerate life what Jesus detected in

it: "They have seen and hated both Me and My Father." God's law is good, even a bad man owns that. Why then does he rebel against it? Because he dislikes the Author of it, Whose authority lies at the back of it. Well: but what next? Work out this conception of human nature, and where will it lead you? To death. To hate is moral death. To hate God above all is death. To be at war with the Source of one's true life means to cut oneself off from the Fountain of goodness and of happiness and of moral being. This is to die. The fruit of insubordinate human nature can in the end be only this and nothing else — eternal, spiritual death: whatever that entirely means, which who can tell us?

Take next, by way of contrast, the new Christian state, which believers owe to their union with the incarnate Son of God. The determining force in the Christian (just as it was in Christ) is God the Holy Ghost. He is the Spirit of the Lawgiver. So far from being at variance with law, therefore, the mind of Christ must be the very genius of law, for it is the mind of the Legislator Himself. Submission to the will of God is thus the keynote of a Spirit-ruled will. Nor does that mean in any sense a forced or a reluctant submission. The whole nature acquiesces. If the Spirit of God be the motive force in one's moral life, then the divine law is sweet as honey and precious as gold; for on its side are enlisted the deepest and most genuine likings, tastes, and moral appetites of the new nature. In a word, the believer submits to law because he is at one with its Author. His mind becomes our mind, His Spirit our spirit, and His will our will. The development of this happy condition reverses the fatal chain which we found in the other case. The soul which cheerfully submits to divine law abides in the peace of God. It is moved to obey by affectionate

and friendly concord with God—in brief, by love. And love drawing us ever more and more near to the centre, within the influence of the divine life, is life for us.

It appears, then, that God's sending His Son in the flesh has introduced into our race a new Divine Centre of life, destined to penetrate and quicken every one who is united to it. How far is this life by the Spirit meant to go? As yet there is but little of it to be seen. On the face of it, Christian men do not seem to enjoy any more immunity from death than other men. They are as weak as others: take ill, grow old, suffer and pine, and die, just like their fellows. St. Paul takes note of this difficulty at the end of our paragraph: but he is not disconcerted by it. The victory of the Spirit of Life over dead human nature is (he admits) a partial victory as yet. We do not see the whole of it: we do not even see the most conspicuous portion of it. For it has begun at the centre, in the secret heart of our manhood. It lies hid at the root of our moral personality, where the bottom springs of responsible life rise. In a word it is the "spirit" of the Christian that is already quickened. It is so in virtue of that righteousness, or submission to law, which is wrought in him by the Holy Ghost. To have a consecrated heart, an obedient will, and a loving spirit means to be alive at the core of our manhood. It is to carry about with us a living spirit within the ribs of carnal death. As yet this is all the quickening we are permitted to see in Christian people: but it is not all that we are to see. The union of a Christian to the man Christ is somehow a union of the entire unbroken humanity of the two. Body and soul alike are brought into contact with the quickening principle. Sooner or later both alike must confess its influence. What the Divine Spirit did once for the incarnate Son as a Man, was done for His body as

well as for His soul. Both have perfect life to-day. And Jesus Christ is the model to which saved men are to be assimilated. As He lives, so are they to live · quickened in the spirit; quickened, too, in the mortal body. Here therefore is the pledge of a future victory over death which shall be conspicuous enough one day. Now, to be sure, the body of a Christian remains as good as dead because of the sin which still lingers in his members. Yet, "since it is the Spirit of Him Who raised up Jesus from the dead that dwells in you, He Who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall quicken also your mortal bodies by reason of the indwelling in you of His Spirit." Then shall the victory be at length complete.

CHAPTER XXI.

FROM PRESENT LIFE TO FUTURE GLORY.

"So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh: for if ye live after the flesh, ye must die; but if by the spirit ye mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him."—ROM. viii. 12-17.

ST. PAUL has just touched (for the first time since the opening of his fifth chapter) on the hope which Christians entertain of a glorious future. The completion of the life-giving process, which begins in the "spirit" but ends in the "quickening of the body" (verse 11), forms a link of connection binding the preceding discussion with that splendid outlook into futurity which, from this verse onwards to the close of the chapter, lends warmth and colour to the Apostle's glowing language. It is at this point that he again catches sight of the "glory to be revealed;" and at the sight his thinking begins to take fire. He hurries forward now to the close and consummation of his gospel.

The first thing to be done, however, is to note the inward union betwixt the present and the future. Salvation, it is certain, cannot be adequately characterised as either a present or a future blessing. It is both; and it is both of them in such vital connection that they cannot be

separated. No man dare hope to share the final benefits of salvation who does not commence by receiving an instalment of it now; nor can he possess the beginnings of salvation now, without being emboldened to anticipate its completion hereafter. The drift of these verses, accordingly, is to mark firmly and briefly the few swift steps by which a believer in Christ may pass from his actual experience of grace in this life to a "sure and certain hope" of the eternal "glory." In them, St. Paul has built a bridge for hope to travel by, that stretches betwixt earth and heaven.

I. The argument starts from that practical influence of the Spirit of God upon daily conduct, with which St. Paul has lately been dealing. This he describes as being "led" by the Spirit. The phrase is a short and easy one. It accurately describes not simply the ideal of Christian life, but even in a fair degree its actual condition. For the word "led" must be admitted to suggest something more than spiritual direction as of a guide to duty who may or may not be followed. It is true enough that the Paraclete is given to shed light on the path of right conduct across the perplexing situations of life. But so outward and formal a conception fails to exhaust the functions of the indwelling Spirit. The word "led" implies that our Leader moves us along whither He would have us go, so that we yield ourselves to His reasonable and righteous impulses (ἄγονται, v. 14). For this is His manner of leading. He is the inspirer as well as the suggester of conduct. He persuades and enables us to walk in the way, as well as points out where it lies. As a patient conductor He waits upon our tardiness, until, by gentle pressure exerted unperceived at the seat or spring of action, He has made us willing to do His will. Therefore, His is no leading at all

unless it be efficacious. If we are "led" by the Spirit, that means that to some extent we are day by day amending our ways, exerting ourselves successfully to do right and making substantial progress in virtue.

Nor is it foreign even to the word itself, far less to the nature of the case, that I should speak thus of a Christian's own exertion and active progress in spiritual life. Unquestionably, the world "led" describes the attitude of the believer as in some sense or to some extent a passive one. It means that he lets himself be acted upon. He submits to the operation of a superhuman force. That is true: and without some such force from above, it is impossible to see how human beings are to be led aright. All the same the phrase hints that a man is not merely passive under the action of the Spirit. To be "led" is a state proper to a rational and self-determining creature. It is not to be pushed like a machine or driven like dumb cattle. God acts upon us as one moral Agent who is mighty and the source of influence, can act upon another moral agent who is feeble and open to influence: that is to say, by secretly instigating or persuading the will to choose freely what is good. No doubt, this cannot be said to exhaust the mysterious operations of the Spirit of life; since being our Maker and Re-Maker, He has His peculiar divine sphere of action behind conscious choice, among those hidden tendencies, powers, and aptitudes which constitute human nature itself. Of this we can say little to purpose. But, so soon as the life reveals itself in consciousness, it is obvious that the Spirit's leading is so far from shutting out the man's own activity or freedom, that on the contrary it implies it. It takes for granted that he follows where God leads, acts as He suggests, and pushes forward along the road to which He urges. That the Apostle recognised this active side of

Christian experience is clear enough from the hortatory cast into which this first paragraph is thrown at its opening. He tells the Romans how they owed it to the Blessed One Who stooped to be their Leader that they should "mortify the deeds of the body." They were to this extent His "debtors," as he puts it. Since God has in His grace approached and entered into man to be His guide to everlasting life, it is, so to say, the least thing man can do, to give himself heartily up to such celestial guidance. The practical issue in every real Christian must be, as a matter of fact, open to observation, that his conduct does move on the whole along lines which are laid down by God in His Word. Explain the mechanism how you please, here at least is the ascertainable result.

II. On the basis of this simple matter of fact, St. Paul moves forward to the second point in developing his transition from "life" to "glory." It is this: wherever you find submission to divine guidance, you have evidence of a divine birth. We have in fact no other mark of that sacred and lofty relationship, the noblest belonging to our nature, save character. By practical acquiescence in the motions of the Holy Ghost, that is, by holy conduct, a Christian has to make it clear to himself and to others that he is a "son of God."

With such sober, homely and solemn teaching as this, it is easy to see how the Gospel erects a barrier against devout delusions such as may readily spring out of religious enthusiasm. It frequently occurs that persons persuade themselves they are the favourites or the children of God on the ground of some vivid experience they have undergone which they take to be "conversion," or because they have been the subject of a surprising vision, a bright light beheld in prayer, or a sudden calm of mind which

they feel certain could only have had a heavenly origin. Nothing can well prove more perilous to character than the security which arises from such a source. For a man to turn away from the severe moral test of obedience in duty in order to build his confidence on emotions, dreams, mental impressions, or any other non-ethical evidence of piety, is to desert the safe guidance of truth and run grievous risk of spiritual shipwreck. The shores of religious experience are strewn thick with the shattered reputations of men who perished on this sunken rock.

On the other hand, when a devout person is actually walking closely in the steps of Christ, being led by His Spirit to maintain a godly and watchful temper in daily behaviour, there is a certain internal witness to his divine birth from which he may legitimately take comfort. The basis for any sound or scriptural confidence that one is a child of God must always remain this—that one's conduct shows one to be "led by the Spirit." But if the life be thus obedient and holy, there are two avenues along which the believer may progress from this starting-point towards a sober assurance of his sonship. He may be able to recall a memorable change in his religious attitude towards God. Or, with no such past revolution to assign for its date of origin, he may yet possess what is still better, a clear consciousness that the childlike attitude of mind towards God is now the prevailing posture of his inner life.

As to the former of these, St. Paul appeals to the recollection of his Roman friends, if, when they first believed the Gospel, they did not experience an entire alteration in their sentiments towards God. Under their previous religion, whether it had been paganism or Judaism, the spirit of their worship had been that of religious fear. Its main characteristic had been the absence

of confidence as regards the Object of worship. Not one of those faiths from which Christianity drew its earliest converts could impart a filial or thoroughly fearless tone over-against the dread and jealous Power above; for this reason, that none of them supplied any valid method for the reunion of the offender to God. Until the Gospel came, every attempt to reach the divine grace left the suppliant more or less uneasy in his conscience. A hope might be cherished that the expiation offered for guilt would suffice; but of such certainty on this head as would warrant the affectionate confidence in God which a child reposes in his parent, there could be none.

The striking revolution of feeling wrought by the reception of the Gospel in any conscientious Jew or heathen of the first century was thus a matter about which he could not well remain in doubt; nor was it an experience he was likely to forget. Till his dying day he must have remembered how the chill mist of religious uncertainty rolled away from his mind when for the first time he was able to look up to Heaven and read no threats in the divine justice nor terror in the divine holiness, but met only the face of a Father Who delights in His recovered children. To this wonderful transmutation St. Paul points the first Christians of Rome. It was not, says he, such a spirit of bondage which you received at your conversion, generating the same religious apprehensions you had known too long. No; it was a very different temper of spirit; one which set you for the first time into bold and loving familiarity with God, and taught you to use as its native utterance the touching child-call, "Abba! my Father!"

How is it with modern believers in respect of this change in religious sentiment? Some, I do not question, have

known it in an unmistakable form. The inborn attitude of the human mind before the Eternal remains what it was. There must therefore be persons who perfectly well remember contemplating God with precisely such a mixture of mistrust and concealed alarm as belonged to pre-christian religions. Time was when they tried to hope that God would hear their prayer for mercy, without ever feeling at their ease; when, in spite of all, the bare idea of the Almighty remained a troubling presence, and His service a burden from which it was a relief to escape. If that can be recalled only as a thing past, they will scarcely forget, any more than a Roman Christian could, what an unspeakable relief came on the first discovery that Christ had settled everything between their conscience and the Most High. It is one of the memorable as well as happy crises in any man's inner history when he is able, after being long tossed with the fear of God's anger, to clasp without misgiving the knees of the Divine Mercy, and falling prone, to babble forth with tears of joy the first simple accents of new-born faith: "My Father Who art in heaven!"

On the other hand, every one cannot recall any similar change, or any change similarly rapid and complete. We are not born heathen; and it may well happen that the Spirit taught us the sweet accents of spiritual childship almost as soon as we learnt to name our earthly parents. For us, therefore, it may be impossible to discriminate from our present life any darker past, which by its contrast might serve to make us conscious that we are passed out of darkness into marvellous light. Notwithstanding, the other avenue I named above is open to us. When a believer is walking as closely as he ought with God, there may exist a sacred and humble persuasion that his actual relationship to God, however it has come about, is no other than

that of son to father. Wherever such a persuasion as this is found within the breast, it is a secret possession for him who has it. No stranger may intermeddle with it. No outsider can ever be made aware of it. It justifies itself only to the soul in which it dwells. It is the witness of God within the man; not the same thing as an inference of the judgment based on the evidence of conduct. True, it needs (as I said) to be sustained or corroborated by a most scrupulous behaviour, else what is called the "witness of the Spirit" may be nothing but a self-imposition. Still, where it is genuine, it is simply a matter of immediate personal consciousness. It is the heart of the son becoming conscious of itself and of its Father as united in one act of mutual trust and love. From a heart so near to God, so open to Him, so humbly bold in its access to Him, so reverently affectionate in its embrace of Him, why may not words of childlike familiarity well out with a happy unconsciousness of their own daring? To its lips may there not come without blame a spontaneous cry like the "Abba!" of Jesus Himself?

III. If on solid grounds a believer has made sure Paul's second arch in this brief bridge which spiritual logic builds from earth to heaven, then he is prepared to go on to the third and last: "If sons, then heirs."

There is no need to institute any curious inquiry here about either the Hebrew or the Roman law of inheritance, as if the Apostle's argument turned upon such niceties. A lawful and beloved son shares his father's estate all the world over. He who belongs to God's family may with safety leave the question of his future inheritance in the hands of a parent who is too generous and too opulent to leave any child without a portion.

But we are not reduced to such inferences, safe though

they may be. For the sonship of the believer is one to which he attains through his union with Christ, the ideal and Eternal Son; one, therefore, that is modelled on the moral type of that sonship and animated by the spirit of it. Consequently his heirship must follow a like analogy. Such a place of dignity and bliss as crowned the obedient passion of the subject Son of God when He had passed through death to glory, such, in the measure of our poor capacity, shall be the place of those whom He will bring to be with Him where He is: "Joint-heirs with Christ!"

The wonder is that a hope so magnificent does not dazzle earthly eyes. For plain people, full of faults, who in this strutting world of little men count for nothing, to be gravely assured that their destiny is to be associated within a year or two with the present condition of the Eternal Son of God, is a prospect the unearthly brilliance of which might well ravish any of us so as to leave scarce interest enough for present affairs. One might suppose that such a future, if a man believed in it, must dwarf into utter nothingness the ambitions and losses of this world, reconcile his patience to any calamity, and elevate his mind quite above the petty rivalries and turmoils that vex the days of common men. Let a clear soul, sure of its celestial parentage, only fasten its vision on the inheritance which within so brief a space is to be its own, and fill itself full with the idea of that approaching elevation, with its sacred delights, its superhuman companionships, its passionless repose, its stainless purity, its ceaseless and saintly occupations: surely such a soul may be expected at least to draw into itself something serene and godlike, a little of the peace and more than a little of the sanctity of heaven!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GROANS OF CREATION.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward. For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."—ROM. viii. 18–22.

IT was impossible for a writer addressing any Church in the Apostolic period to forget that the Christian's lot was one of exceptional suffering. The handful of obscure men who at that time constituted the Church of Christ in any of the great towns, Ephesus, Corinth, or Rome, had to pay dear for their faith. Orthodox Judaism hated them and hounded on the pagan populace to persecute them. Even the tolerant law of Rome could be set in motion to proscribe them. Conversion to a new faith must always entail alienation from relatives, the contempt of society, and a painful sense of isolation from the traditions of the past, as well as from the movements of the present. In their case it meant more. It brought them bonds, fines, stripes, and banishment; it brought rough handling from fanatical mobs; it brought now and then the lions of the circus, or the headsman's axe. It is, therefore, far from surprising to find that the Apostolic letters are full of

encouragements for the endurance of earthly calamity, fetched from the anticipation of future bliss. If ever a Church had need to be saved *by hope*, that one had. Its eye required to be bent steadily forward on a future which should repay for the sacrifices and pains of present martyrdom. From a splendid recompense, hidden as yet from sight, it needed to draw strength in its weakness and fortitude to sustain its endurance.

The coming compensation which St. Paul sketched for the solace of his correspondents is one which grew by a natural necessity out of their present faith. In themselves they had an invincible persuasion that already they were sons of God. To that dignity they had been elevated through their union with Christ; for Christ is the Son of God. The spirit of confidence and love which they had received from God was a filial spirit. The Holy Ghost within them was witnessing to their adoption and teaching them to cry "Abba! our Father!" If that was so, then a day must come when such a hidden relationship to the Eternal should step forth into light and be openly acknowledged. Sons must be heirs; and their inheritance, concealed for the present, could not be for ever concealed. If Christ was the model on Whose Sonship their own relationship to God was constructed, then His advance to dignity and power at the right hand of the Father prefigured what was in store for them. It only needed a little waiting for, until spiritual facts should receive a patent disclosure and external circumstances be brought into keeping with eternal truths. Then their real glory as members in the reconciled family of God must appear. Then their likeness to God's glorified Son must be made both complete and manifest. Then their physical constitution, their surroundings and their mode of life must all be changed, from pain to bliss, from dishonour to glory,

from groans to songs, from daily dying with Christ to eternal life with Him.

How great this transformation might turn out to be, which was guaranteed by their Christian consciousness, who could tell? As another Apostle said, it did not yet appear. Only that the glory, when it came, must immeasurably outweigh whatever they had now to endure, was absolutely certain. How much better it might be, to be at length with Christ and like Christ, when God's saving work should have attained its completion, was more than could yet be told; but at least it must be so much better than the present as to dwarf present suffering in comparison, and make all the ills of this life a bagatelle, not worth naming or computing. Weigh the short-lived affliction in a true scale with that weight of glory: it is not worthy to be compared. "So I reckon," says Paul: I for my part, as a man who has himself elected, just as you have, the afflicted, persecuted, tormented condition of a Christian—nay, of a Christian missionary.

It was, therefore, due to no speculative interest, but for a very practical and urgent purpose, that St. Paul set himself in this passage to emphasise both the greatness and the certainty of the Christian's future. In doing this, he betrays that splendid combination of lofty thought and speculation with practical concerns which is characteristic of him as a teacher. To his eye, the approaching blessedness of a few converts at Rome was no isolated or accidental fact. It was part only of a grand reconstruction of all things, which should embrace, along with redeemed humanity, the very world itself. Such a reconstitution of the world was the end-goal towards which the profound designs of the Almighty had all along been tending. It was the splendid hope for which not the saints of God alone, but even material creation

had long been standing, as it were, on tiptoe of expectation, straining weary eyes through many a darkened age to catch the dawn of coming day. It was the world's new birth, for which Nature itself seemed to him to groan in labour-pains. Like the best of the old prophets of his nation, he kindles at this vision of a golden age to be. This theologian becomes the poet as well. He sets himself to interpret the voices which anticipate such a welcome consummation: the involuntary, unconscious pangs of dumb creation, first, weighed down beneath its curse of incompleteness and unprofitableness; and not that only, but the deepest longing of every Christian heart, enveloped as it is and oppressed with the burden of the body (ver. 23); nor even that alone, but those inarticulate groanings also by which God Himself Who dwells in Christian hearts utters in the ears of God what cannot be framed in speech—the craving of human need after a fellowship with God, a coming victory over evil, a somewhat of spiritual good, of which we can have only vague premonitions so long as we tarry here in the shadows of earth (ver. 26). Nature waits groaning; man, the Christian, waits groaning; God Himself, the Spirit, groans within us. How great must the deliverance be which is the common object of this strange consent of hope! It is the liberty of the glory of the sons of God.

In trying to understand the several voices which make up such a chorus of expectation, we must commence with the dumb companion of our hope, the physical creation; and as that is the least familiar, it will call for the fuller illustration.

According to the uniform view of Scripture (with which the most thoughtful literature of the world agrees), man is the head and the interpreter of this whole earthly creation, to which he so closely belongs. He is

bound in intimate bonds with Nature. As its foremost and only self-conscious member, he has a faculty to divine and to utter (as it cannot do) both its glory and its weakness, its beauty and its imperfection. Looking forth upon the unconscious life which clothes the earth, he finds himself to be in a strange mystic sympathy with all its moods. The birth and the decay of nature-life—the dawn and twilight of the day—the voices of wind and wave—the brief flush of glory in the flowering plant—the mute yearning after confidence and fellowship in the brute; these things play on the sensitive spirit of the man who dwells with Nature. To him they speak. They touch in him answering chords. They connect themselves with the hidden things of his own spirit. They breathe their meaning into his thoughts and find a tongue within his lips. It is the true secret of all poetry and of all art, this profound oneness between man and Nature. It is the secret both of the influence which Nature wields over men, and of the control which men exercise over Nature. It is for this reason that the meanest flower that blows can stir thoughts which lie too deep for tears. For this reason, too, by what Mr. Ruskin terms the "pathetic fallacy," we read back into Nature our own emotions. If at one time the poet's heart be jocund with the dancing daffodils, at another he will see in their "hasting away so soon" a memento that "we have as short a time to stay as you." No deep thinker will doubt that there is a foundation for this close sympathy between physical creation and man, its intelligent spiritual chief. The two have been in God's plan linked to one another. We also are in part "of the earth, earthy;" and earth through all its parts is ordained to share our mighty and checkered destiny. It darkened when man fell; it is to be renewed when man is glorified.

By a bold figure of poetic speech, the Apostle personifies creation as subjected unwillingly to a yoke of "vanity" and "corruption;" yet, recognising that this is neither its true nor its final condition, he sees it stretching its neck in hope of a coming Deliverer; he hears it groan out its yearning after a new birth that is to be. Between the lines of this highly wrought imaginative picture can we read anything which will answer to the plain facts we know? I think we can. For one thing, that part of physical nature with which man has most to do has unquestionably shared in the sad effects of his sin. Take the lot of the domestic animals. In some respects these have been bettered by domestication, but in others they have suffered frightfully from the tyranny, neglect, and cruelty of their fallen lord. He wears out their lives in labour. He dashes them in the madness of war against his foes. He imprisons them to amuse his leisure. He butchers them to feed his appetite. Even the creatures without life, which were meant to minister to our gentle use, like the iron and gold and jewels, or the wines and fruits of the kindly earth, have been turned into the menials of our vices. We have abused them from their just service to pamper lust, or deck the brow of pride, or arm the hand of violence. How hard a master has Nature found in sinful man! How has its fair face been defiled, and its happy offspring made to bleed, and its pure gifts turned into instruments of death! With what reason may this be called an involuntary bondage, beneath which Nature seems, as it were, to groan for some better day to come, when a purified race shall enjoy without abusing a regenerated earth!

I am not satisfied, however, that this participation of Nature in the sad results of the Fall exhausts the meaning of St. Paul's words. Death and decay, vanity and

corruption, were in the world before man. They reign in those parts of our globe where human foot never treads; they would remain were our race as virtuous as the angels. Deep in the very constitution of our present earth, and continuous along its whole past history, I think we may trace this subjection of all its animated beings to a law of vanity. For what is *vanity?* It is the inability to realise an ideal or perfect condition; and the inability, when it has reached its best, to stay there. Incompleteness and transitoriness are the twin evils which stamp upon creation an unsatisfactory character. These twins are everywhere in the world which we know, and they have been in it always. What has been the progress of life upon our globe but a striving after the unattained? If the theory of organic development, which is at present an hypothesis, should ever be verified, it would only bring out more clearly the imperfect, provisional and progressive character of creation, as St. Paul saw it. We are in a world which has not yet attained, neither is already perfect, but which yearns and labours in the hope to produce what shall be better than itself.

At any rate, it is no hypothesis, but a fact, that no individual creature fulfils its idea; none is flawless, none complete, none incapable of amendment. "Very good," God called His earth; and very good it is, for its purpose supremely fit, and in that fitness lovely beyond expression. But its purpose! what is that? To be the nursery and the school of an imperfect learner—the transient home of a spiritual child on his way to mature or adult life. For that, and no more than that, man was to be, even had he never fallen, so long as he had not been changed from flesh and blood into incorruption. For such an end as that, this earth is plainly better suited than one more ideally perfect, and therefore more

unchangeable. What we see in the lower creatures is a constant though unconscious effort after the ideal; a constant failure to realise it; and therefore a constant flux and passing away of being, to give place to new forms, which are in their turn as transient as the former. Offspring succeeds parent, to be itself succeeded; just as in the long past, species has succeeded to species. This Paul calls "vanity;" and I know not what else we can call it. It makes the phenomena of creature-life unsatisfying, temporary, and deceptive. When the young thing comes into being, it seems rich in splendid possibilities; but no sooner is it grown with effort to a certain ripeness, than its strength begins insensibly to decay. Each fresh spring wakes up a jubilant life and puts on a raiment of loveliness, and all things quiver as with an old hope revived. But the year disowns the promise of its opening. Its leaves, how soon are they dashed with storm!—its fruit, how far is it behind the blossom! Disappointed, defeated, it takes refuge from its own weariness beneath the snows. So the days circle and the seasons; and, in spite of very much that is exquisite and delightful, the end-result comes always to be "vanity and vexation of spirit."

Let those say who know best the world's best literature, if the thinkers and seers of all ages, its poets especially, have not been aware of this under-tone of sadness or dissatisfaction marring the gay moods of Nature and running through her merriest songs. Why do idle tears spring to eyes that look on autumn fields? Why are our sweetest songs those which tell of saddest thought? Why do we all say the waves moan, and the winds sigh, and the clouds weep? Are we not involuntarily interpreting to ourselves that mysterious pain of unquiet endeavour and destiny unaccomplished which makes Nature herself a fit comrade for the perishing generations of mankind, and gives to the

physical and material world a little of the same pathos which clings to the present life of man?

If there is any explanation possible which can lighten this puzzling fact of universal bondage to corruption in the works of God, it lies, I think, in the language of my text. St. Paul implies that this is not what Nature was destined for. It is, in a sense, an "unwilling" bondage. It is against the tendencies of Nature herself, for she abhors the imperfect and the transient as truly as she abhors a vacuum. It is God's doing for a temporary end. It *is* to be temporary; since He subjected His creation to this fate *in hope*. *In hope!* there is the one divine word which will explain or justify everything. Sympathising with her human head, creation bows to her temporary bondage; but as a nobler condition has been promised to that central and ruling creature who is God's son, so the poor mute partners of man's humiliation are to be his partners likewise in the day of his glory. Nature is a sharer in the hope of humanity.

This is not teaching to be gathered from Nature itself. It is Christian teaching. It grows right out of the revelation of God in Christ. The Eternal Son of the Father, archetype of man, is become man. Born of the Virgin, He became, like all of us, a part of Nature; linked to this very creation which is in bondage to vanity. He is now Nature's Head, because He is the Son of Man and the Head of every other man. He is Nature's representative, its new Adam, its First-Fruits, its Redeemer from vanity and corruption. But He is already transformed out of the corruptible into incorruption; out of transitoriness and mortal change into permanence; out of vanity into perfection and eternal life. In a word, He has been delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the Son of God. In His deliverance is con-

tained a pledge of that for which Nature groaning waits. The original conditions under which our world was placed and has been kept so long become intelligible when we see that the world, like man, is a redeemed world, on its way to share in the splendid destiny to which Christ conducts redeemed humanity.

If we are to receive teaching like this, I repeat that it must be by faith. Science will not help us here any more than science can tell how at first the worlds were framed by the Word of God. Investigation has revealed nothing as to the real genesis of creation. It can reveal nothing as to its palingenesis, its regeneration or second birth. But when we believe in the Incarnation and in the Redemption; when we believe that the earth's destiny is mixed up with human destiny, and human destiny with that of the Son of God; when we believe that Jesus was raised in a body material yet possessed of incorruptible glory, and that the saints shall be raised in the same likeness—then we can believe also in "a new heaven and a new earth." Of the future constitution of the globe and of its future population revelation has revealed next to nothing. Perhaps it might not be possible to reveal much under the limitations of our present knowledge. Certainly it could not be helpful to our moral progress to puzzle us now with the mysteries of coming material changes. But nothing as yet known to us forbids the idea of a world in which every creature should fulfil its ideal and retain its perfection; a world from which flaws and decay and failure and corruption and groans should be banished; a world whose loveliness should be enduring as the blue of sapphire or the green of emerald, and its materials as pure and free from stain as pavement of crystal washed with the river of God.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WAITING IN HOPE.

"And not only so, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For by hope were we saved; but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopeth for that which he seeth? But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. And in like manner the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity; for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; and He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."—ROM. viii. 23–27.

TO be a Christian means to be more alive than other men are.* The life of faith, born of God, touches a vaster world than this. It lies open to greater forces than play on other men. The evils which a religious man fears, the blessings which he seeks, are grander than those of earth. His thoughts range over ampler themes. The infinite and eternal is about him as he moves; and in that more awful fellowship his life widens and grows intense.

The most advanced Christians are susceptible, for this reason, to deeper kinds of pain than earthly natures feel. To say this is not to deny the more abundant joys of regenerate experience. Though peace and hope and contentment in God are calmer forms of enjoyment than the feverish draught of appetite or of passion, yet they draw

* Compare Christ's words: "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John x. 10).

from a divine depth a deeper happiness. But susceptibility to more spiritual joys carries with it a corresponding susceptibility to new and keener pains. Constituted as existence is in this world, all light must cast a shadow proportioned to its own brightness.

Nor is it difficult to perceive that the main source of inward pain to Christians must lie in the incongruity which obtains between this new life and its surroundings. At the core, a Christian is a new man; yet the environment of that new man is all old. Not only do old habits retain their power and old passions continue to fret, but the old society enweaves him still in its mesh and the old occupations engross him as they used to do. His spirit is redeemed, it is true; yet it is as closely implicated as ever in an unredeemed world.

At one point especially is it plain that the new man remains firmly attached to the old conditions. I mean, by his body. The spiritual child of God still underlies the bondage of corruption on the physical side of his being. Through that link he continues to be involved, as a member of this mundane system of things, in the "vanity" to which the whole creation is subjected. He shares with everything earthly in its incompleteness and transitoriness. With all animal existence he shares its gross physical necessities; and with our fallen race he shares the vain habits which have been handed down from our forefathers, as well as the temptations to evil which are involved in the arrangements of society.

I despair to suggest by a few words in what countless ways the physical conditions of life are incessantly clogging or neutralising the action of the redeemed nature. No doubt it is not exclusively on the physical side that evil assails us. It is fair to add that diabolic sins like pride, distrust, selfishness, and malignity flourish indepen-

dently of material incitements, and could not be got rid of simply by being disembodied. Christian life, however, when it has attained a good development, proves itself a match for such spiritual vices, in innumerable instances where it still suffers under evils both physical and moral that are the direct result of its earthly surroundings. It is especially as a hindrance to spiritual activity and a provocative to unspiritual indulgences that the outer world tells against Christian life. What languor, for instance, and religious depression are bred of bodily causes, what nervous anxiety about the future, what weariness in devotion, what unreadiness for the service of God and man! How the very duties of daily existence as well as its necessary social intercourse impede the religious life and gnaw away its strength! How constantly through the operation of outward circumstances is a good man weighed down under a sense of dissatisfaction and of endeavour unaccomplished! To be quit of this worldly life would certainly do nothing at all to deliver a bad man from his love of evil; but it might conceivably do a very great deal to set a good man free to do good more easily and freely. Who can tell how instant, how magical in its effect, may be the deliverance wrought by death for one whose deep longings after God and holiness have all his days been imprisoned in his heart, buried beneath a burden of fleshliness, thwarted by an uncongenial world! Once released from these untoward surroundings, how may the real man leap upward, to put forth in a more congenial atmosphere the free and fragrant life of beatified saintship!

The truth is that the present position of God's children in this world can be nothing but a puzzle, or bundle of paradoxes. The language of St. Paul reflects the inconsistency of their situation. He styles them redeemed, yet expecting redemption; adopted, yet waiting for the adoption; set free,

yet in bondage to evil; risen from death, yet, behold, they die daily. The key to these paradoxes can only be found in this,—that Christian men are in a state of transition. They are caught in an unfinished process. A change has been begun which is not yet complete. Call it renewal or redemption or deliverance, or what you please; some solemn and splendid process, of which the man is conscious, has set in at the core of his being. But the outward part of him is the last to be reached by the change; and so long as that remains unreached, so long must this puzzling dualism last. Alive in part, but also in part dead or dying, noble at once and mean, the man is at his centre a citizen and heir of God's eternal heaven, yet by his outer physical attachments bound to the groaning creation and heir to its vanity and mortality.

It is not as if we had a quarrel with matter or with Nature. Our quarrel is with the inharmoniousness of this present state of being with a spirit quickened from above. What the saint longs for is not emancipation from the material, but the emancipation of the material from the bondage of corruption; not to be done with earth, but to see earth done with sin and vanity; not to be unclothed of the body, but to be clothed upon with a body that is celestial. In this there is nothing Manichæan, not the slightest tinge of asceticism; but there is a fellow-feeling, profound and inveterate, with that mystic longing which pervades material creation for the accomplishment of the purpose of God, and for the transmutation of His material world into its destined and perfected and enduring condition.

What, then, is the attitude which best befits this situation? It is this—to *wait in hope!* The unintelligent creatures wait, but not in hope. They travail as in pain with the burden of a future birth, of which they themselves

are ignorant; or they long, as Paul poetically pictures them, with outstretched neck and weary eye, after they know not what. We know what we wait for. The sons of God possess already an earnest of their coming inheritance. Little as they know of what it will be when it appears, they know at least that it will be the completion of what they now possess in part—the spiritual likeness of Jesus Christ; and this hope, based on promise and matured by experience, lends calmness to Christian waiting and endurance to Christian fortitude. "We are saved by hope."

Even in unbelievers who feel acutely the present ill, or who reflect deeply upon it, there is for the most part a prognostication of some end-goal towards which they say humanity must be tending. All thoughtful men who are not pessimists are compelled to cherish the belief that the "far-off divine event" towards which the ages slowly move must prove to be, some-how, some day, a "golden age" of light and peace and freedom and domestic purity and social order and widespread content and universal brotherhood—a day of sabbatic rest after earth's long wars and fruitless toil. Save before the fall of the Roman Empire, and again in the dark century which preceded the year of our era 1000, believed to be big with fate, it is possible that no recorded period of history has seen the throbbing of the world's heart after such a denouement more strong than it is to-day. But this secular hope lacks the christian foundation. It, too, knows not well what it hopes for, or why it hopes for it. It is at best an inference from probabilities, where it is not a mere reflection from christian teaching. With many it is a thought born of a wish. Yearnings like that may prove prophetic or they may not. Thank God that in the resurrection of our Lord he who has embraced the chris-

tian faith holds a distinct pledge of what earth and mankind are vaguely crying after! A beginning has been made even of the redemption of matter. One earthly body lives undying in the eternal glory. One foretaste has been given of the consummation towards which all history moves. On the firm ground which this faith affords the feet of Christian Hope are planted; with head uplifted toward heaven, her eyes are lit with the dawning of the day.

Sober this hope of Christian men in the final regeneration of all things may always be. Confident it should be, for it is built on divine facts. But how seldom can it reach a buoyant or cheerful tone! How often, while we must sit and wait silent in the darkness, is the sad heart overborne by a myriad shapes of doubt and trouble which appear to block every avenue of deliverance! What shall the weary soul do then when her Lord seems so far away and the wheels of His chariot so long in coming? Do! Let her cry! Shall the confused moaning of the creatures have a meaning in His ear Who made them, and shall not His own children cry to Him for deliverance when the burden of corruption weighs them too heavily to the ground? Yet here again is our infirmity. We know not in such a strait what we should pray for as we ought. In all troubles of a purely spiritual nature we need be at no loss. It can never be wrong to beg Him to deliver us from sins, from unbelief and a cold heart, from an insincere tongue, or a thankless spirit. But this complication of secular misfortunes—may I pray to be rid of that? This difficult position, where the world's pressure of temptation grows unbearable—is it right to seek escape from that? This sick, scourged, or maimed tabernacle of the body —what shall I ask for it? God has not told us how far we may seek relief from these things or when He means

to set us free from them. Knowing that they are all elements in His discipline of our spiritual nature, one knows not what to wish or pray for. Hardly dare a dying saint in his pain ask for the release of death, since to abide in the flesh may be more needful for others. What to pray for we know not; and yet in our anguish pray we must.

It seems as though there were here an extremity fit to be God's opportunity. St. Paul's words (ver. 26), mysterious as in some respects they are, suggest to us how, in this our infirmity, One comes near with secret hand to subvent and help us. The Christian oppressed with the world's load is not, it appears, alone at his solitary prayers. A mystic Comrade is near, though undetected by our consciousness, so intimately does He become the Confidant and Partner of our secret life. With this instinctive longing of christian hearts to be rid of their evil environment, He cherishes a genuine sympathy. He tempers the natural cry of one in pain into dutiful and gracious submission. He enables the soul to breathe into God's ear a scarce-formed, scarce-spoken wish—a groan not much more articulate than those of creation. Such groans are good prayers. It is true you dare not define in set terms either the manner or the time of the deliverance you crave. You scarce dare say aloud so much as that you crave it at all. No matter. To be able to utter a petition in articulate words, it is necessary no doubt to form a mental conception of what it is you ask for. But when all that we are conscious of is a dim sense of need—when we know not clearly what the best answer to our need may be— then the prayer that is crushed out of the soul is inarticulate. It is like the cry of a dumb thing in its pain; not asking for anything, so much as making appeal only to the great pity of One far wiser and better. It is like the silent look of a stung and tortured child in

the serpent's coil to the wider wisdom and the stronger arm of the father. Such formless appeals, groans, if you will, unclothed in phrases intelligible to human ear, go up (let us be sure of it!) articulate and intelligible enough to the listening ear of Heaven. It is because the secret God Who inhabits the petitioner makes that petition His own. With an awful tenderness of sympathy He prays it along with you. Although on earthly lips it dies away into a babble or a sigh, or rises into a cry "of little meaning though the words be strong," it is otherwise with the Divine Co-petitioner within the bosom. He knows full clearly what the soul would be at, if she only knew how to reach it. He interprets the real deep under-sense of our groaning. So understood in Heaven's light, He prays the prayer along with us, and means just what we ought to mean if we knew how, just what we do obscurely and at bottom mean. To the great hearkening ear of the Eternal Love, therefore, the sob, the spasm of unresolved desire goes up a clear-voiced petition of most sweet sound, asking for just that wisest, noblest answer to all earth's wrongs and griefs which from everlasting it has lain in our Father's heart to grant.

Beneath this representation of the Apostle there lies beyond all question a deep mystery. The coincidence of the Divine Spirit in these profoundest, saddest moods of christian experience, when the evils of the present force the saint to cry out after a deliverance whose nature he cannot formulate in thought, touches the very root of our spiritual being, which is God in us and with us, our life of life. But what mighty support is here suggested beneath the weight of earthly and fleshly ills! How beset is a christian man with divine sympathy and the aid of his Divine Friend! Within, one Paraclete, encouraging, sustaining, interceding; yet so close that His activity

merges itself imperceptibly in the actings of our own nature. Above, another Paraclete or Intercessor, Who likewise, touched with the same feeling of our infirmity, makes prayer for us in His own Name on high, and is able thus to succour us in an hour of temptation and of need. What magnificent forces girdle the struggling soul! What messengers mightier than any angel have come to minister to the heirs of salvation! What manner of answer must that be which shall fulfil at last all that creation labours towards in her pain, all that the christian hearts of all the ages sigh after in their mortal need, all that God Himself unites to desire for His groaning children! The voices of strong desire which have been going upward to the Father, age after age, are echoing still, a vast and gathering sound of entreaty, a mighty ocean-murmur of appeal against sin and sin's havoc upon earth, against death and vanity and the bondage of corruption; and still the volume gathers, for the answer is still delayed. When, in the blessed will of Heaven, the just moment shall arrive for the manifestation of God's sons in the likeness of Christ, and earthly creation shall be transfigured, and human life beatified and canonised, how shall the moan of pain and the sigh of hope deferred and the groan of passionate unaccomplished longing give place to the jubilant song of a delivered world!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FIVE LINKS OF SALVATION.

"And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose. For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."—ROM. viii. 28–30.

THE Christian optimism of St. Paul has very little in common with that easy-going philosophy, which, without having laid to heart the mystery of moral evil, assumes in a jaunty fashion that everything must turn out for the best in the long-run. Where any theory at all lies at the bottom of such light-heartedness, it can only be this, that evil is in every case a necessary passage towards good; so that, no matter how men act, the goal of all must be universal happiness. Were this an exhaustive account of human life, it would indeed be foolish to trouble oneself very much about anything. This is certainly not St. Paul's teaching, for he does not say "all things work for good" to every man; nor Christ's, for He knew of some for whom it had been better if they had never been born.

The error in this slipshod theory of "all for the best all round," consists in leaving out of sight the fatal significance of an evil will. It is perfectly true that our Father in heaven desires all things to turn out for good to every one, for He means His providence to be a discipline conducting us to repentance and holiness. If only the

conscience and heart of every man, taught by the salutary lessons of experience, would amend and seek the Father's face when He chastens, then surely every event would tend to final "good." But it is a tremendous "if." The evil love of a bad heart and the evil choice of a bad will can never be for the best. These work only and always for the worst. When prosperity inflates a man with conceit or tempts him to self-indulgence; when adversity embitters his temper or drives him to vice or misanthropy —are they "working together for good"? Is there not rather for some people a frightful concurrence of all things for evil, when out of wholesome providences an ungodly temper extracts nothing but encouragement in pride or provocation to self-will?

St. Paul's language therefore is quite bold enough to correspond with the facts, when he limits the concurrence of all things for good to one class of persons only. It is a class strictly defined on two opposite sides. That the whole of a man's experience should concur to promote his ultimate advantage, two conditions are essential. The one is inward and personal. He must bear himself aright toward Him Whose providence is playing upon him. He must be a lover of the God Who orders all things. It is a brief and pithy account of that temper of mind which is able to extract good out of everything. Love is the secret alchemy that transmutes into celestial gold the dross of daily experience. To take the ups and downs of life, neither in atheistic indifference, nor with the misjudging interpretation of self-love, but as one who knows and loves the Fatherly Hand from which they come, is to read in each of them His own kind meaning, and be moved by them all alike to fresh acts of piety. Devout hearts find even the obscure and beaten ways of common life to be full of God. Nothing comes amiss to them; for they lie open to a Voice, still and low, which

whispers to the listening ear through every channel. If it is an art to decipher the gracious sense of all that happens, who is so likely to acquire that rare and delicate skill as he who loves the best, and, because he loves, knows best the God of providence? Indeed, a good deal of the benefit to be gained through the experiences of life consists in the mere habit of dependence and submission upon the Unseen Friend which it engenders. Like a Nobler Son, we too have to learn obedience through what we suffer, and humility through our humiliations. Given the child-heart that loves and waits—what earthly change of lot can fail to come like a laden angel from the Presence, bringing gifts that wrap no sorrow in the heart of them?

The other condition attached by St. Paul to his optimistic summing up of life is of a different character. It concerns not our personal attitude, but the divine will. The two must always in point of fact coincide; since they who love God are also the "called according to His purpose." But the divine prevision and foreordination are introduced here, as I suppose, in order to remind the reader that Grace and Providence are two concurrent parts of one design, fitted into each other. He Who purposed in His grace to call His people to salvation, is He Who has at the same time planned their whole course of life so as to minister to that final issue. It is the gracious intention to save through Christ which prescribed a ruling aim to providence. To that intention everything else is made subordinate. In the light of that everything reveals its meaning. "All things" which happen to the Christian are not only consistent with his spiritual welfare—they are expressly designed to advance it. In the plan of one's life, how many strange factors combine! how many unexpected and unlikely co-operators are laid under contribution! Blasts of ill fortune which shake one's faith really tighten the hold of the soul on God. Seductions

from duty, when they are withstood, only confirm the habit of self-control. One's work may appear a failure or be cut short before it is ripe, but the disappointment ends in flinging the worker more entirely into the arms of his Lord, and maturing his devotion for nobler service in a higher field. We may see it or not; and, for the most part, we do not see it; but the loving heart can trust the All-wise to make no mistake. So may the Christian front the changeful years with a placid temper, suck sweetness out of every growth of time, and walk the earth like a king whom all things serve as his obsequious ministers. Stand on this height of faith where St. Paul's bold words set you: you are on a "heaven-kissing hill," serene for ever with the light that never sets, and far below you float the shifting clouds of time. See, how they form: they break and scatter; once more they gather into gloom, and all the air is restless and vexed with storm. But from this clear hill-top faith can look down secure and sing with unfaltering lip:—

"I stand upon the mount of God
With sunlight in my soul;
I hear the storms in vales beneath,
I hear the thunders roll.

"But I am calm with Thee, my God,
Beneath these glorious skies;
And to the height on which I stand
Nor storms nor clouds can rise."

Still further to bring out this security of the Christian's salvation, or the certainty that in the divine plan seeming hindrances shall prove to be real helps, St. Paul proceeds to show in what a chain of divine acts the believer is implicated, who has been "called" in accordance with the purpose of God.

For an exhaustive exhibition of the truth, it is quite certain that another side of it has to be embraced besides

the one expressed in these verses (29, 30). Salvation is more than a concatenation of divine acts. No act of God in reference to man can be out of relation, or out of harmony, with man's own free-will. In his acceptance and faithful use of grace, the Christian is of necessity both a voluntary and an active co-factor. Here, however, where the matter in question is the certainty that no outward hindrance shall frustrate the salvation of a believer, the human factor may be for the moment left out of reckoning. What men have to do in trusting and obeying Christ or in "making their own election sure" is important in its proper place. But its place is not here. For the unfailing security of the believer is guaranteed, in the last resort, by the fact that his redemption is of God's grace, from its inception right on through all its stages to the end.

Five divine acts, through each of which in succession the purpose of salvation advances to its accomplishment, are linked by St. Paul into one golden chain, of which one end is let down out of the unknown past, and the other returns to lose itself in the unknown future. Only at its middle point does it descend to touch the present experience of men. The central link lies close at hand. It is the "call" already spoken of, which brings a man to Christ. To each of us in our sinfulness there comes with a mingled authority and sweetness that voice which bids us "come unto Me." With such majesty and yet such grace does it invite us, that the soul which trembles for conscious guilt and labours being heavy-laden, has no heart to refuse its call. With hesitating wistful feet I come; the timid hand scarce dares to clasp its Saviour; yet instantly, in the very act, there is cast around the helpless soul a chain of love and faithfulness, of Heaven's own temper. Poor and evil as I am, I am caught up within the coils of a mighty Purpose of Almighty God, everlasting as Himself, a World-purpose of infinite and resistless

grace, which sweeps from heaven to earth and back again from earth to heaven. This temporal earthly link to which I cling—this Gospel call of mercy—hangs by links which are pre-temporal and transcendental, anterior to all experience. Back of human history, it hangs by the unsearchable foreknowledge and foreordination of the Eternal. Long ago was fixed the destination to which they who believe on Christ are to be conducted: and onward to that end-goal are "the called" borne, through justification to glory; till the chain which at its former end is lost in the mystery of the divine decree is lost at its further end in the ineffable splendour of the heavenly life.

The starting-point of human redemption is concealed from our inspection. It is to be sought in eternal acts of the Divine Mind, of which too little has been disclosed for us to say much with confidence. Over these mysterious words, "foreknew" and "foreordained" (in the Revised Version) or "predestinated" (in the Authorised), fierce battles have been waged betwixt rival schools of philosophical and theological thought. The knot of the problem—which is to reconcile the absoluteness of the divine decree with the liberty of human choice—is one for philosophy more than for theology; because it is a knot which Scripture has not untied, and the solution of which scarcely affects in the slightest the practical interests of the religious life. From the side of philosophy it seems more than questionable if the difficulty be soluble with our present faculties. What remains save to respect the due claims both of the divine volition and of the human, since God's plan of the world has made room for both, while we abandon as beyond our power the intellectual reconciliation of the two?

What St. Paul seems concerned to urge in passages like the present, and what therefore it concerns our piety to hold fast, may be summed up in a few sentences. The primal cause or source to which we must refer the whole

series of redemptive acts is the sovereign love of the Most High. In His eternal act of will by which the Almighty embraced His counsel of redemption from first to last, there could be no uncertainty as to the issue of it —the number or the persons of those who should in the end reap its saving benefits. Of the grounds which determined "the election of grace," we can give no account; but that the Infinite Mind foresaw and the Infinite Love contemplated in His eternal plan all who shall be saved, cannot be doubted, either on grounds of Scripture or of reason. Further, the end-goal to which the called are being guided in God's grace is one equally foreseen and predetermined. It belongs to infinite wisdom to work all things according to a purpose: it belongs to infinite power that His purpose shall not fail.

While little can be said to profit concerning those early links in the divine counsel which lie behind us, the future for which the redeemed are destined is announced by St. Paul with the utmost precision. There is in the divine purpose both a nearer and a remoter end. The nearer end is the moral assimilation of each Christian to Christ. Christ is the Christian's "type." He is the realized ideal of saved humanity. Nor only is He ethically the closest possible reproduction in the human form of so much of the divine glory as is communicable to man; but in Him as He now lives in deathless bliss, human nature itself has received its apotheosis. Humanity is raised first to its perfection; then glorified through union with the Divine. This type for the redeemed of mankind, therefore, is something more than that old *εἰκών* or image of God after which God made Adam. In its second Head "from heaven," humanity exists not restored merely, but transformed; not as innocent, but as perfected. This was in God's eternal thought the model to which each saved man is destined to be "conformed."

The remoter end is not individual but collective; not saved men but a brotherhood of the saved. To encircle the first Wearer of human nature in its redeemed perfection of sonship unto God with a countless band of similar brothermen, reflectors of His likeness and comrades in His glory —this is the final outcome, the attainment of which accomplishes the thought and satisfies the heart of God.

From first to last, this magnificent chain of redemptive acts permits neither halt nor rupture. The secret counsel of His will holds in its bosom all those whom the future glory shall receive. This is the thought on which, by the structure of his sentence, St. Paul intended to lay stress; and with reason, since it is the thought which pledges to faith the security of the believer and the concurrence of "all things" for his final good. Such lofty teaching as this is easily susceptible of being abused. We shall abuse it if we refuse to obey the call of the Gospel because we are unable to ascertain God's secret counsel. We shall abuse it if we resign ourselves to a fatalistic security because His purpose stands secure. We shall abuse it if we neglect to purify ourselves from sin because one day we are to be "glorified." None the less may the humble-minded and watchful believer, who trembles at God's word, use these great truths for a solace under the heavy burdens of this present time. None the less may he repose his feebleness against the infinite Bosom of God, stretch himself upon the everlasting Arms that encircle him, and lay his care upon the strength of that Hand out of which none can pluck him. All along his pathway through the hazards of time to the rest of eternity, may he count on the amazing promise of One Who bends providence to His ends of grace, that "all things are working together for the good of him who loves God and has been called according to His purpose."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CHALLENGE OF FAITH.

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that shall condemn? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."—ROM. viii. 31–39.

THE long discussion which opened at the sixteenth verse of the first chapter has reached its close. Step by step, in language which must always remain the text-book of christian theology, has this inspired doctor of the church unfolded the Gospel as the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." While his ardent mind runs through the high argument, and especially when at the close he dwells on the security we possess for the accomplishment of God's saving purpose, the Apostle's style rises in dignity and force. His speech takes fire as it moves. His very logic grows red-hot and runs into a poetic mould; until he cannot choose but

burst into a pæan of exultant praise over the unassailable security of the redeemed.

In point of rhetoric, this peroration is the most sublime passage in all St. Paul's writings. To such a passage it is scarcely possible or even desirable to apply a cool analysis. To dissect it with minuteness is to run the risk of missing, not merely its literary beauty, but even its spiritual power. I wish therefore to keep what I have to say in accord with the tone of this splendid conclusion. At the same time, it has been my object throughout these chapters to make as clear as I can in popular language the precise connection of the Apostle's thought. In order to maintain this method to the close, we must notice how these splendid sentences are introduced, and why they assume the form of a challenge, almost of a defiance.

Their immediate point of attachment is to be sought in the twenty-eighth verse. It was remarked in my last chapter that the optimism of that verse is strictly limited in its scope. All things do not "work together for good" in the case of every man, but only for elect and godly men who love God. Even under this restriction, the Roman Christians may have found it hard, as other Christians have done, to believe it. The experience of God's people is not all to appearance helpful for good. In every age the life of Christians has been environed with a girdle of adverse influences, which so far from seeming to promote their salvation, are leagued to hinder or defeat it. At the metropolis of imperial heathendom in the first century, the little community which St. Paul addressed may have felt as if he only mocked its distress who said, "All things are working together for your good." But St. Paul has sustained his bold assertion by an appeal (verses 29, 30) to that closely knit chain of saving acts through which God has effectually provided that His

gracious design shall not fail, no matter what untoward circumstances or formidable obstacles may oppose it. This being so, what room is left for discouragement? The persecuted convert at Rome, or the saint of any period, can find nothing to object, after he has well considered "these things." Over against that chain of the divine decree, why not place another, called the challenges of faith? At every antagonist of meaner worth than the Almighty, fling such a defiant question as this, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" In this way the exultation of St. Paul over the security of believers assumes very naturally the form in what we meet it here, of a rapid rhetorical series of challenging questions, followed by triumphant replies.

At the opening of the series, the writer is, as might be expected, more argumentative in his rhetoric than he becomes further on after he has gathered heat. It is accordingly in the 31st and 32nd verses that we find the reasoning most nakedly expressed. Let us briefly examine it.

Since God has engaged Himself to save those whom He has "called according to His purpose," His purpose can fail of its accomplishment only on one or other of two suppositions: either because a power superior to His own opposes, or because the end in view demands on His part a greater sacrifice than He is prepared to make. The former alternative is clearly inadmissible. As to the second, the matter needs fuller proof. Is God then so much "for us," that He is willing to employ for our salvation His whole plenitude of resources? Can we safely count on His grudging or withholding nothing that is needful to effect His purpose of grace? The question is no less vital than the former. Against God, if He do His utmost, no creature can avail. But will God do His

utmost for such an object? The question is answered by an appeal to facts. St. Paul points us to what God has already sacrificed in the cause of His people's redemption. The surrender of His Son to die was an act so much beyond parallel that after it there is no conceivable gift of His which does not look trivial in comparison.

It is difficult to overestimate the force of this mode of reasoning as a testimony to St. Paul's view of the person of Christ. No man could argue as he does here who did not regard our Lord as a Being immeasurably above all others in His pre-existent dignity and incomparably near in love and honour to the Father. The inference is that if the divine heart was so bent on saving us that to compass this end the Son was not withheld, nothing else will be grudged, since every other sacrifice which can be given is infinitely less. Against such a conclusion, shallow views of the origin and divine dignity of our Lord must be shattered.

The argument itself is for its purpose quite invincible. When one's spirit grows faint with misgiving, because the ultimate deliverance from evil begins to look uncertain through a mist of tears; when envious vapours of sorrow dim the shining of the divine love; when we have to measure with dismay our puny strength against such grisly antagonists as mortal pain and death; then let us arm ourselves with the stout reasoning of this Apostle, stalwart of heart and brain as he is, and ask ourselves: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

From the safe shelter of this "shield of faith," the Apostle can afford to survey with courage the ring of possible adversaries and defy in succession their several onsets. There are three stages in this challenge.

First: Who shall our Accuser be? This is to begin at the weakest point; for every man is by nature weak through his guilt and lies open at the mercy of any adversary who chooses to lay his sins to his charge. He knows it, too. The conscience trembles, for it is "a guilty thing surprised" and "doth make cowards of us all." Men who have lived christian lives in all honesty from their childhood, are sometimes disquieted at the recollection of past offences. Satan knows how to play the rôle of the Accuser, although it ill becomes him; and the citadel of peace has to sustain an assault, nay, a siege, whilst all that a man has ever said or done amiss, his slips in duty, his evil tongue, his proud temper, his murmurings, his insincere devotions, his formalities, his insincerities—are marshalled in horrid array and launched against him with the taunt: How dare such an one as you call himself a child of God?

At such moments of alarm the believer finds no defence save in the free mercy of the Gospel. He must take refuge beneath the divine promise of gratuitous acquittal through the blood of Jesus. "It is God that justifieth." "We are justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." "We have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Nothing will stop the accuser's mouth but the one mighty act of God's sovereign grace by which He acquits and justifies the sinner. This makes the timid believer bold again; for it arms him with an answer to the Adversary.

Second: Be it so; let the accusers be all heard, if they will. Do not stop their mouth as if the cause were a bad one. Summon your worst enemy to the seat of judgment and bid him do his utmost. After every fault has been laid to the charge of a believer, "who shall con-

demn?" Ah, that is another affair. That is no part of the Adversary's rôle. Accuse he may: condemn he dare not. The Judge alone can do that; and beside the Judge —what do I say? in the seat of judgment itself—is One Whose presence there is a verdict of acquittal. For Jesus the Judge is in His own person, a threefold, fourfold answer to every charge against His people. Is it alleged that they have sinned and deserve to die? It is He Who died for them. Nay, Who rose from the dead in token of their acquittal. Nay more, Who even reigns at God's right hand on purpose to secure deliverance. Nay, once again, Who is Himself the Intercessor for them there, pleading against their condemnation His meritorious and accepted passion! "Who can condemn?"

Third: There lingers behind one other shadowy shape of doubt, impalpable and chill as any ghost, but no less hard to lay. The inviolable safety of any sinner who can claim a Saviour in the person of his Judge and finds in his Redeemer's love an answer to every charge, may well be conceded. But what if, amid the spiritual antagonisms of this life, some adverse current should sweep us beyond the reach of that saving love? What if the soul and Christ be sundered in the storms of time? What if temptation or strong adversity or fatal mischance of any sort should so interpose that in His gladness He forget my need or in His displeasure reject my cry!

The fear is natural and will haunt the timorous mind. Nevertheless, it is a vain alarm. The very adversities which one fears may prove too much for love, only give occasion for its triumphant display. Life never presents to the modern Christian a more formidable array of evils than it offered to St. Paul and his friends in Rome. Like the Hebrews of the Restoration for whom was composed the plaintive Psalm which St. Paul quotes, they were

"killed all the day long" for their God's sake. Yet round upon the perils which begirt them does this bravest of confessors bid them cast a defiant eye. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" "Tribulation" that assails from without? or "anguish" of heart within? or public "persecution" for the faith? or "famine or nakedness" through confiscation and exile? or even "peril" of life? or the executioner's "sword" at last? Can such a sevenfold league of enemies prevail to sunder from the guardianship of the Saviour any soul that loves Him? Nay: for, as the annals of the faith have shown abundantly from that day till this, the love of Christ can keep His followers steadfast in extremity and make them snatch a triumph from the very jaws of death. The faith of the Apostle, as he flings down his glove to the forces of the world, has found a myriad echoes in the heroism of martyrs. What is his challenge itself but an echo to the calm strong words of the King: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world."

The confidence of St. Paul essays a yet higher flight. It is a light thing to say that neither the harshness of Roman law, nor the insults of the Roman populace, nor the spite of a heathen master, nor the alienation of heathen relatives, could divorce from the new found love of Jesus one converted slave in the Trastevere. To tell the truth, this eternal love that chose us before the world, sought us when lost, and died for our sin, is of all powers in heaven or earth the oldest, strongest, and most victorious. Rising above the passing incidents of the hour to survey from a higher altitude the whole universe of created being, St. Paul protests that not within its ample skirts does the power exist which christian faith need fear. He sweeps creation into a few vast categories. No condition of

existence possible to man—be it life or death; nor any spiritual force above human ken—be it angel or principality of good or ill; no, nor any furthest bounds of space—as height or depth; nor any change that time can work—whether in the present or in the future:—*nothing* can break the sacred link which unites the ransomed soul to the Redeemer's love! What after all are these, every one of them, but creatures only? His creatures, made to "work together" in His saving plan, or failing that to be baffled and defeated that the counsel of His heart may stand.

For here after all stands faith's innermost stronghold and asylum—in the eternal Purpose of Almighty Love. Sweet it may be and gentle as heaven's own light to weary eyes; yet is it firm as adamant, as a Rock of Eternity. Here is the unfailing confidence of Saints. They build on the everlasting counsel of the Supreme Will, the end-design for which all things exist and which all things serve. Sooner than that should fail, shall earth pass and time decay and creation itself wax old and die. On this foundation of God let our faith build a hope full of immortality: on Him Whose eternal will is the safeguard and the guarantee of our eternal life. Then may Faith sing her serene defiance to the powers of hell: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

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